A Change of Air

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ANTHONY HOPE HAWKINS.

A CHANGE OF AIR.

BY

ANTHONY HOPE

AUTHOR OF "THE PRISONER OF ZENDA," ETC.

NEW YORK

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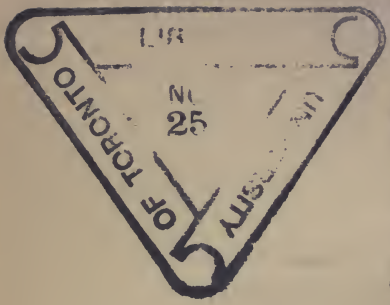

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"ANTHONY HOPE."

In his speech at the annual banquet of the Royal Academy in 1894, among many other good things, Mr. Andrew Lang said:

"The thrifty plan of giving us sermons, politics, fiction, all in one stodgy sandwich, produces no permanent literature, produces but temporary 'tracts for the times.' Fortunately we have among us many novelists—young ones, luckily—who are true to the primitive and eternal, the Fijian canons of fiction. We have Oriental romance from the author of 'Plain Tales from the Hills.' We have the humor and tenderness—certainly not Fijian, I admit—which produces that masterpiece 'A Window in Thrums'; we have the adventurous fancy that gives us 'A Gentleman of France,' 'The Master of Ballantrae,' 'Micah Clarke,' 'The Raiders,' 'The Prisoner of Zenda.'"

The last of these books was by Anthony Hope Hawkins, whom Mr. Lang thus classed among potential immortals. This romance has made him within the last three months fairly famous. Walter Besant, too, has stamped it with his high approval, and the English and American press have been unusually unanimous in their praise.

Its hero is a rare and striking figure, and thoroughly represents the ideal soldier of our Anglo-Saxon race. He faces great dangers and does brave deeds, quietly and quickly. He suffers and loves deeply, but says little. In his portrayal, the possibilities of "repressed emotion" have been startlingly indicated. He appeals to Americans and English far more than the swaggering and loquacious, though more historic heroes of Dumas and his school ever can.

Much curiosity has been excited regarding "Anthony Hope."

The author's methods of composition and what may have suggested the very original plot are as yet unknown. Besides what we may get from his portrait, we are told that he is "a tall, thin, dark man, with a face that would be ascetic if it were not bubbling with humor." He is a lawyer, as other good romancers have been before him, and has chambers in the Middle Temple, a place made famous in fiction by Thackeray and on the stage by Pinero. His profession and politics are his chief concerns, and literature a diversion in his leisure hours. He is an extremely modest man, and in response to a request from his American publishers for autobiographical matter, gave the barest facts of his life. He expressed absolutely no opinion on literary canons or on his own work. There was, however, a rare sincerity and cordiality in his letters.

Anthony Hope Hawkins was born in 1863, his father being the Rev. E. C. Hawkins of St.

Brides, Fleet Street, London. He was educated at Marlborough, and at Baliol College, Oxford, of which he was a scholar. At Oxford, he was a hard worker and obtained first classes in Classical Moderations and in the School of Litteræ Humaniores, commonly known as "Greats." At this university, where he attained the degree of M. A. some eight years ago, he began to show an aptitude for public life, was a striking figure among his contemporaries, and became president of the Union. In 1892 he stood as a Liberal candidate for a seat in Parliament from the southern division of Buckinghamshire, but was defeated by Viscount Curzon.

His first book, "A Man of Mark," was published in 1890, and was followed next year by "Father Stafford," an interesting study of an Anglican priest's struggles between love and sense of obligation to his vow of celibacy. The pictures of his cheerless ascetic life are marked by the sincerity conspicuous in Mr. Hawkins later books. Some very thoughtful conversations on art and on religion are introduced.

In 1892 appeared "Mr. Witt's Widow, a Frivolous Tale" of a lady who had "harmonious contrasts," such as dark eyes and golden hair. It foreshadows the power in plot-making that characterizes our author's later works.

In the spring of 1893 appeared "Sport Royal," a collection of Mr. Hawkins' short stories, mostly from the *St. James' Gazette*.

In "Half a Hero," published last year, there are several foreshadowings of "The Prisoner of

Zenda." In both stories the scene is imaginary, but given realism by characteristics respectively of New Zealand and of Germany; in both intrigues and heroism are conspicuous, though in the latter the author did not adopt the old device of giving his hero some bad qualities to make him human. "Half a Hero" contains much firm, crisp character-drawing, and a strong love interest, but has the slight taint of the "purpose novel," already noted in Father Stafford; in this case, the discussion being politics, especially the "labor" element.

Anthony Hope inherited refinement through a father in an exalted calling; he used his college advantages to the utmost, and now his interests are in living public affairs, and in his chosen calling as a lawyer, he has good opportunities to study life, and seems already to have well mastered the best elements of Anglo-Saxon character. From his work, he appears to have read widely and with a sympathetic eye for the merits of markedly diverse writers, which he seems to make his own. His style has the terseness and suggestiveness characteristic of Kipling, but without his harshness, and at times he shows a sense of beauty almost worthy of our own Hawthorne, and withal the military dash and snap of Lever. It would be strange if the foundation for the remarkably life-like colonists of "Half a Hero," and the German officers of "The Prisoner of Zenda," had had not been laid by travel and the observation of their more or less remote prototypes.

"A Change of Air," while containing much

of its humor and snap, furnishes a marked contrast to "The Prisoner of Zenda," and is in a more serious vein, having a strong and tragic undercurrent, and not without an element of peril. Confining its occurrences pretty severely to the possible and generally probable, it nevertheless is highly original. Dale Bannister, the wild young poet, who commences by thoroughly scandalizing Market Denborough, is a most picturesque and uncommon character. The effect of his early principles on his later life is deftly indicated. The story moves on steadily, and while it teaches a lesson of moderation and charity, it does so entirely by the acts and thoughts of the characters without any sermonizing on the part of the author. Some good authorities that have seen this book place it even above "The Prisoner of Zenda," which we probably shall see on the stage next year, as the author has a friend busily engaged on its dramatization.

R. H.

July, 1894.

A CHANGE OF AIR.

CHAPTER I.

A Mission to the Heathen.

HEN the Great King, that mirror of a majesty whereof modern times have robbed the world, recoiled aghast from the threatened indignity of having to wait, he laid his finger with a true touch on a characteristic incident of the lot of common men, from which it was seemly that the state of God's Vicegerents should be free. It was a small matter, no doubt, a thing of manners merely, and etiquette; yet manners and etiquette are first the shadowed expression of facts and then the survival of them; the reverence once paid to power, and now accorded, in a strange mixture of chivalry and calculation, to mere place whence power has fled. The day of vicegerents is gone, and the day of officers has come; and it is not unknown that officers should have to wait, or even—such is the insolence, no longer of office, but of those who give it—should altogether go without. Yet, although everybody has now to wait, everybody has not to wait the same length of time. For example,

"Who cares what they say?" laughed Dale. "They seem to buy it."

Arthur looked at him with revengeful eye, and suddenly inquired.

"What about Nellie?"

"That's just the delightful part of it," answered Dale eagerly. "Nellie's been seedy ever so long, you know. She was ordered perfect rest and country air. But it didn't run to it."

"It never ran to anything here," said Philip in a tone of dispassionate acquiescence in facts, "till you became famous."

"Now I can help!" pursued Dale. "She and Mrs. Hodge are coming to pay me a long visit. Of course, Phil's going to be there permanently. You'll come too, Arthur?"

At first Arthur Angell said he would not go near a villa; he could not breath in a villa; or sleep quiet o' nights in a villa; but presently he relented.

"I can't stand it for long, though," he said. "Still, I'm glad you're going to have Nellie there. She'd have missed you awfully. When do you go?"

"Actually, to-morrow. I'm not used to it yet."

Arthur shook his head again, as he put on his hat.

"Well, good-night," said he. "I hope it's all right."

Dale waited till the door was closed behind his guest, and then laughed good-humoredly.

"I like old Arthur," he said. "He's so keen

and in earnest about it. But it's all bosh. What difference can it make whether I live in London or the country? And it's only for a little while."

"He begins to include you in the well-to-do classes, and suspects you accordingly," replied Philip.

There was a knock at the door, and a pretty girl came in.

"Oh, I ran up," she said, "to ask whether this hat would do for Denshire. I don't want to disgrace you, Dale;" and she held up a hat she carried in her hand.

"It would do for Paradise," said Dale. "Besides, there isn't going to be any difference at all in Denshire. We are going to be and do and dress just as we are and do and dress here. Aren't we, Phil?"

"That is the scheme," said Philip.

"We shall care for no one's opinion," pursued Dale, warming to his subject. "We shall be absolutely independent. We shall show them that their way of living is not the only way of living. We——"

"In fact, Nellie," interrupted Philip, "we shall open their eyes considerably. So we flatter ourselves."

"It's not that at all," protested Dale.

"You can't help it, Dale," said Nellie, smiling brightly at him. "Of course they will open their eyes at the great Mr. Bannister. We all open our eyes at him, don't we, Mr. Hume? Well, then, the hat will do—as a week-day hat, I mean?"

"A week-day hat?" repeated Philip. "Dear old phrase! It recalls one's happy church-going youth. Have you also provided a Sunday hat?"

"Of course, Mr. Hume."

"And, Dale, have you a Sunday coat?"

Dale laughed.

"It's a pretty excuse for pretty things, Phil," he said. "Let Nellie have her Sunday hat. I doubt if they'll let me into the church."

Philip stretched out his hand and took up a glass of whisky and water which stood near him.

"I drink to the success of the expedition!" said he.

"To the success of our mission!" cried Dale gayly, raising his glass. "We will spread the light!"

"Here's to Dale Bannister, apostle *in partibus!*" and Philip drank the toast.

CHAPTER II.

The New Man at Littlehill.

MARKET DENBOROUGH is not a large town. Perhaps it is none the worse for that, and, if it be, there is compensation to be found in its picturesqueness, its antiquity, and its dignity; for there has been a town where it stands from time immemorial; it makes a great figure in county histories and local guidebooks; it is an ancient corporation, an assize town, and quarter-sessions borough. It does not grow, for country towns, dependent solely on the support of the rural districts surrounding, are not given to growing much nowadays. Moreover, the Delanes do not readily allow new houses to be built, and if a man lives in Market Denborough, he must be a roofless vagrant or a tenant of Mr. Delane. It is not the place to make a fortune; but, on the other hand, unusual recklessness is necessary to the losing of one there. If the triumphs of life are on a small scale, the struggle for existence is not very fierce, and a wise man might do worse than barter the uncertain chances and precarious joys of a larger stage, to play a modest, easy, quiet part on the little boards of Market Denborough.

It must not, however, be supposed that the lion and the lamb have quite sunk their differences and lain down together at Market Denborough. There, as elsewhere, the millennium tarries, and there are not wanting fierce feuds, personal, municipal, nay, even, within the wide limits of Mr. Delane's tolerance, political. If it were not so, the Mayor would not have been happy, for the Mayor loved a fight; and Alderman Johnstone, who was a Radical, would have felt his days wasted; and the two gentlemen would not have been, as they continually were, at loggerheads concerning paving contracts and kindred subjects. There was no want of interests in life, if a man were ready to take his own part and keep a sharp eye on the doings of his neighbor. Besides, the really great events of existence happened at Market Denborough much as they do in London; people were born, and married, and died; and while that rotation is unchecked, who can be seriously at a loss for matter of thought or topic of conversation?

As Mr. James Roberts, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, a thin young man, with restless eyes and tight-shut lips, walked down High Street one hot, sunny afternoon, it never entered his head that there was not enough to think about in Market Denborough. Wife and child, rent, rates and taxes, patients and prescriptions, the relation between those old enemies, incomings and outgoings, here was food enough for any man's meditations. Enough? Ay, enough and to spare of such distasteful, insipid, narrow, soul-destroying stuff.

Mr., or, to give him the brevet rank all the town gave him, Dr. Roberts, hated these sordid, imperious interests that gathered round him and hemmed him in, shutting out all else—all dreams of ambition, all dear, long-harbored schemes, all burning enthusiasms, even all chance of seeking deeper knowledge and more commanding skill. Sadly and impatiently the doctor shook his head, trying to put his visions on one side, and nail his mind down to its work. His first task was to turn three hundred pounds a year into six hundred pounds. It was hard it should be so, and he chafed against necessity, forgetting, as perhaps he pardonably might, that the need was the price he paid for wife and child. Yes, it was hard; but so it was. If only more people would be—no, but if only more people who were ill would call in Dr. Roberts! Then he could keep two horses, and not have to "pad the hoof," as he phrased it to himself, about sweltering streets or dusty lanes all the long afternoon, because his one pony was tired out with carrying him in the morning to Dirkham, a village five miles off, where he was medical officer at a salary of forty pounds by the year. That was forty, and Ethel had a hundred, and the profits from his paying patients (even if you allowed for the medicine consumed by those who did not pay) were about a hundred and fifty. But then the bills—— Oh, well, he must go on. The second horse must wait, and that other dream of his, having an assistant, that must wait, too. If he had an assistant, he would have some leisure for research, for read-

ing, for studying the political and social questions where his real and engrossing interest lay. He could then take his part in the mighty work of rousing——

Here his meditations were interrupted. He had reached, in his progress down the street, a large plate-glass-windowed shop, the shop of a chemist, and of no less a man than Mr. James Hedger, Mayor of Market Denborough. The member of the lower branch of their common art was a richer man than he who belonged to the higher, and when Mr. Hedger was playfully charged with giving the young Doctor his medicines cheap, he never denied the accusation. Anyhow, the two were good friends, and the Mayor, who was surveying his dominions from his doorstep, broke in on Dr. Roberts' train of thought with a cheerful greeting.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked.

"No; I've no time for the news. I always look to you for it, Mr. Mayor."

"It mostly comes round to me, being a center, like," said the Mayor. "It's natural."

"Well, what is it this time?" asked the Doctor, calling up a show of interest. He did not care much for Denborough news.

"Littlehill's let," replied the Mayor.

Littlehill, the subject of Philip Hume's half-ironical description, was a good house, standing on rising ground about half a mile outside the town. It belonged, of course, to Mr. Delane, and had stood empty for more than a year. A tenant at Littlehill meant an increase of custom for the tradespeople, and perchance for the

doctors. Hence the importance of the Mayor's piece of news.

"Indeed?" said Roberts. "Who's taken it?"

"Not much good—a young man, a bachelor," said the Mayor, shaking his head. Bachelors do not require, or anyhow do not take, many chemist's drugs. "Still, I hear he's well off, and p'r'aps he'll have people to stop with him."

"What's his name?"

"Some name like Bannister. He's from London."

"What's he coming here for?" asked Roberts, who, if he had been a well-to-do bachelor, would not have settled at Market Denborough.

"Why shouldn't he?" retorted the Mayor, who had never lived, or thought of living, anywhere else.

"Well, I shouldn't have thought he'd have found much to do. He wouldn't come in the summer for the hunting."

"Hunting? Not he! He's a literary gentleman—writes poetry and what not."

"Poetry? Why, it's not Dale Bannister, is it?"

"Ay, that's the name."

"Dale Bannister coming to Littlehill! That is an honor for the town!"

"An honor? What do you mean, sir?"

"Why, he's a famous man, Mr. Mayor. All London's talking of him."

"I never heard his name in my life before," said the Mayor.

"Oh, he's a genius. His poems are all the rage. You'll have to read them now."

"He's having a lot done up there," remarked the Mayor. "Johnstone's got the job. Mr. Bannister don't know as much about Johnstone as some of us."

"How should he?" said Roberts, smiling.

"Johnstone's buildin' 'im a room. It 'll tumble down."

"Oh, come, Mr. Mayor, you're prejudiced."

"No man can say that of me, sir. But I knows—I know Johnstone, Doctor. That's where it is!"

"Well, I hope Johnstone's room won't fall on him. We can't spare Dale Bannister. Good-day, Mr. Mayor."

"Where are you goin'?"

"To Tom Steadman's."

"Is he bad again?" inquired the Mayor, with interest.

"Yes. He broke out last week, with the usual result."

"Broke out? Yes! He had two gallons of beer and a bottle o' gin off the 'Blue Lion' in one day, the landlord told me."

"They ought to go to prison for serving him."

"Well, well, a man drinks or he don't," said the Mayor tolerantly; "and if he does, he'll get it some'ow. Good-day, sir."

The Doctor completed his rounds, including the soothing of Tom Steadman's distempered imagination, and made his way home in quite a flutter of excitement. Hidden away in his

study, underneath heavy medical works and voluminous medical journals, where the eye of patients could not reach, nor the devastations of them that tidy disturb, lay the two or three little volumes which held Dale Bannister's poems. The Doctor would not have admitted that the poems were purposely concealed, but he certainly did not display them ostentatiously, and he undoubtedly told his wife, with much decision, that he was sure they would not prove to her taste. Yet he himself almost worshiped them; all the untamed revolt, the recklessness of thought, the scorn of respectability, the scant regard to what the world called propriety, which he had nourished in his own heart in his youth, finding no expression for them, and from which the binding chains of fate seemed now forever to restrain his spirit, were in those three slim volumes. First came "The Clarion and other Poems," a very small book, published by a very small firm—published for the author, though the Doctor did not know this, and circulated at the expense of the same; then "Sluggards," from a larger firm, the source of some few guineas to Dale Bannister, of hundreds more if he had not sold his copyright; and lastly, "The Hypocrite's Heaven," quite a lengthy production, blazoning the name of the leading house of all the trade, and bearing in its train a wealth of gold, and praise, and fame for the author: yes, and of rebuke, remonstrance, blame, and hands uplifted in horror at so much vice united to so much genius. Praise and rebuke alike brought new bricks to build the pyramid of glory; and

on the top of it, an object of abhorrence and of worship, stood the young poet, prodigally scattering songs, which, as one critic of position said of them, should never have been written, but being written, could never die. Certainly the coming of such a man to settle there was an event for Market Denborough; it was a glorious chance for the poet's silent, secret disciple. He would see the man; he might speak with him; if fortune willed, his name might yet be known, for no merit of his, but as that of Dale Bannister's friend.

Women have very often, and the best of women most often, a provoking sedateness of mind. Mrs. Roberts had never read the poems. True, but she had, of course, read about them, and about their author, and about their certain immortality; yet she was distinctly more interested in the tidings of Tom Steadman, a wretched dipsomaniac, than in the unparalleled news about Dale Bannister. In her heart she thought the Doctor a cleverer, as she had no doubt he was a better, man than the poet, and the nearest approach she made to grasping the real significance of the situation was when she remarked:

"It will be nice for him to find one man, at all events, who can appreciate him."

The Doctor smiled; he was pleased—who would not be?—that his wife should think first of the pleasure Dale Bannister would find in his society. It was absurd, but it was charming of her, and as she sat on the edge of his chair, he put his arm round his waist and said:

"I beat him in one thing, anyhow."

"What's that, Jim?"

"My wife. He has no wife like mine."

"Has he a wife at all?" asked Mrs. Roberts, with increased interest. A wife was another matter.

"I believe not, but if he had——"

"Don't be silly. Did you leave Tom quiet?"

"Hang Tom! he deserves it. And give me my tea."

Then came the baby, and with it an end, for the time. of Dale Bannister.

CHAPTER III.

Denborough Determines to Call.

WILL awake the world," Dale Bannister had once declared in the insolence of youth and talent and the privacy of a gathering of friends. The boast was perhaps as little absurd in his mouth as it could ever be; yet it was very absurd, for the world sleeps hard, and habit has taught it to slumber peacefully through the batterings of impatient genius at its door. At the most, it turns uneasily on its side, and, with a curse at the meddlesome fellow, snores again. So Dale Bannister did not awake the world. But, within a month of his coming to Littlehill, he performed an exploit which was, though on a smaller scale, hardly less remarkable. He electrified Market Denborough, and the shock penetrated far out into the surrounding districts of Denshire—even Denshire, which, remote from villas and season-tickets, had almost preserved pristine simplicity. Men spoke with low-voiced awe and appreciative twinkling of the eye of the "doings" at Littlehill: their wives thought that they might be better employed; and their children hung about the gates to watch the young man and his guests come out. There was disappoint-

ment when no one came to church from Littlehill; yet there would have been disappointment if anyone had: it would have jarred with the fast-growing popular conception of the household. To the strictness of Denborough morality, by which no sin was leniently judged save drunkenness, Littlehill seemed a den of jovial wickedness, and its inhabitants to reck nothing of censure, human or divine.

As might be expected by all who knew him, the Mayor had no hand in this hasty and uncharitable judgment. London was no strange land to him; he went up four times a year to buy his stock; London ways were not Denshire ways, he admitted, but, for all that, they were not to be condemned off-hand nor interpreted in the worst light without some pause for better knowledge.

"It takes all sorts to make a world," said he, as he drank his afternoon draught at the "Delane Arms," where the civic aristocracy was wont to gather.

"He's free enough and to spare with 'is money," said Alderman Johnstone, with satisfaction.

"You ought to know, Johnstone," remarked the Mayor significantly.

"Well, I didn't see no 'arm in him," said Mr. Maggs, the horse-dealer, a rubicund man of pleasant aspect; "and he's a rare 'un to deal with."

Interest centered on Mr. Maggs. Apparently he had spoken with Dale Bannister.

"He's half crazy, o' course," continued that

gentleman, "but as pleasant-spoken, 'earty a young gent as I've seen."

"Is he crazy?" asked the girl behind the bar.

"Well, what do you say? He came down a day or two ago, 'e and 'is friend, Mr. 'Ume——"

"Hume," said the Mayor, with emphasis. The Mayor, while occasionally following the worse, saw the better way.

"Yes, 'Ume. Mr. Bannister wanted a 'orse. 'What's your figger, sir?' says I. He took no notice, but began looking at me with 'is eyes wide open, for all the world as if I'd never spoke. Then he says, 'I want a 'orse, broad-backed and fallen in the vale o' years.' Them was 'is very words."

"You don't say?" said the girl.

"I never knowed what he meant, no more than that pint-pot; but Mr. 'Ume laughed and says, 'Don't be a fool, Dale,' and told me that Mr. Bannister couldn't ride no more than a tailor—so he said—and wanted a steady, quiet 'orse. He got one from me—four-and-twenty years old, warranted not to gallop. I see 'im on her to day—and it's lucky she is quiet."

"Can't he ride?"

"No more than"— a fresh simile failed Mr. Maggs, and he concluded again—"that pint-pot. But Mr. 'Ume can. 'E's a nice set on a 'orse."

The Mayor had been meditating. He was a little jealous of Mr. Maggs' superior intimacy with the distinguished stranger, or perhaps it

was merely that he was suddenly struck with a sense of remissness in his official duties.

"I think," he announced, "of callin' on him and welcomin' him to the town."

There was a chorus of approbation, broken only by a sneer from Alderman Johnstone.

"Ay, and take 'im a bottle of that cod-liver oil of yours at two-and-three. 'E can afford it."

"Not after payin' your bill, Johnstone," retorted the Mayor, with a triumphant smile. A neat repartee maketh glad the heart of the utterer.

The establishment at Littlehill and the proper course to be pursued in regard to it were also the subject of consideration in circles more genteel even than that which gathered at the "Delane Arms." At Dirkham Grange itself the topic was discussed, and Mr. Delane was torn with doubts whether his duty as landlord called upon him to make Dale Bannister's acquaintance, or his duty as custodian-general of the laws and proprieties of life in his corner of the world forbade any sanction being given to a household of which such reports were on the wing. People looked to the Squire, as he was commonly called, for guidance in social matters, and he was aware of the responsibility under which he lay. If he called at Littlehill, half the county would be likely enough to follow his example. And perhaps it might not be good for half the county to know Dale Bannister.

"I must consider the matter," he said at breakfast.

"Well, one does hear strange things,"

remarked Mrs. Delane. "And aren't his poems very odd, George?"

The Squire had not accorded to the works referred to a very close study, but he answered offhand:

"Yes, I hear so; not at all sound in tone. But then, my dear, poets have a standard of their own."

"Of course, there was Byron," said Mrs. Delane.

"And perhaps we mustn't be too hard on him," pursued the Squire. "He's a very young man, and no doubt has considerable ability."

"I dare say he has never met anybody."

"I'm sure, papa," interposed Miss Janet Delane, "that it would have a good effect on him to meet us."

Mr. Delane smiled at his daughter.

"Would you like to know him, Jan?" he asked.

"Of course I should! He wouldn't be dull, at all events, like most of the men about here, Tora Smith said the Colonel meant to call."

"Colonel Smith is hardly in your father's position, my dear."

"Oh, since old Smith had his row with the War Office about that pension, he'll call on anybody who's for upsetting everything. It's enough for him that a man's a Radical."

"Tora means to go, too," said Janet.

"Poor child! It's a pity she hasn't a mother," said Mrs. Delane.

"I think I shall go. We can drop him if he turns out badly."

"Very well, my dear, as you think best."

"I'll walk over on Sunday. I don't suppose he objects to Sunday calls."

"Not on the ground that he wants to go to church, at all events," remarked Mrs. Delane.

"Perhaps he goes to chapel, mamma."

"Oh, no, my dear, he doesn't do that." Mrs. Delane was determined to be just.

"Well, he was the son of a Dissenting minister, mamma. The *Critic* said so."

"I wonder what his father thinks of him," said the Squire, with a slight chuckle, not knowing that death had spared Dale's father all chance of trouble on his son's score.

"Mrs. Roberts told me," said Janet, "that her husband had been to see him, and liked him awfully."

"I think Roberts had better have waited," the Squire remarked, with a little frown. "In his position he ought to be very careful what he does."

"Oh, it will be all right if you call, papa."

"It would have been better if he had let me go first."

Mr. Delane spoke with some severity. Apart from his position of overlord of Denborough, which, indeed, he could not but feel was precarious in these innovating days, he thought he had special claims to be consulted by the Doctor. He had taken him up; his influence had gained him his appointment at Dirkham and secured him the majority of his more wealthy *clientèle;* his good will had opened to the young unknown man the doors of the

Grange, and to his wife the privilege of considerable intimacy with the Grange ladies. It was certainly a little hasty in the Doctor not to wait for a lead from the Grange, before he flung himself into Dale Bannister's arms.

All these considerations were urged by Janet in her father's defense when his title to approve, disapprove, or in any way concern himself with Dr. Roberts' choice of friends and associates was vigorously questioned by Tora Smith. Colonel Smith—he had been Colonel Barrington-Smith, but he did not see now what a man wanted with two names—was, since his difference with the authorities, a very strong Radical; on principle he approved of anything of which his friends and neighbors were likely on principle to disapprove. Among other such things, he approved of Dale Bannister's views and works, and of the Doctor's indifference to Mr. Delane's opinion. And, just as Janet was more of a Tory than her father, Tora—she had been unhappily baptized in the absurd names of Victoria Regina in the loyal days before the grievance; but nothing was allowed to survive of them which could possibly be dropped—was more Radical than her father, and she ridiculed the Squire's pretensions with an extravagance which Sir Harry Fulmer, who was calling at the Smiths' when Janet came in, thought none the less charming for being very unreasonable. Sir Harry, however, suppressed his opinion on both these points—as to its being charming, because matters had not yet reached the stage when he could declare it, and as to its being

unreasonable, because he was by hereditary right the head of the Liberal party in the district, and tried honestly to live up to the position by a constant sacrifice of his dearest prejudices on the altar of progress.

"I suppose," he said in reply to an appeal from Tora, "that a man has a right to please himself in such things."

"After all papa has done for him! Besides, Sir Harry, you know a doctor ought to be particularly careful."

"What is there so dreadful about Mr. Bannister?" asked Tora. "He looks very nice."

"Have you seen him, Tora?" asked Janet eagerly.

"Yes; we met him riding on such a queer old horse. He looked as if he was going to tumble off every minute; he can't ride a bit. But he's awfully handsome."

"What's he like?"

"Oh, tall, not very broad, with beautiful eyes, and a lot of waving auburn hair; he doesn't wear it clipped like a toothbrush. And he's got a long mustache, and a straight nose, and a charming smile. Hasn't he, Sir Harry?"

"I didn't notice particularly. He's not a bad-looking chap. Looks a bit soft, though."

"Soft? why, he's a tremendous genius, papa says."

"I didn't mean that; I mean flabby and out of training, you know."

"Oh, he isn't always shooting or hunting, of course," said Tora contemptuously.

"I don't suppose," remarked Janet, "that

in his position of life,—well, you know, Tora, he's of quite humble birth,—he ever had the chance."

"He's none the worse for that," said Sir Harry stoutly.

"The worse? I think he's the better. Papa is going to ask him here."

"You're quite enthusiastic, Tora."

"I love to meet new people. One sees the same faces year after year in Denshire."

Sir Harry felt that this remark was a little unkind.

"I like old friends," he said, "better than new ones."

Janet rose to go.

"We must wait and hear papa's report," she said, as she took her leave.

Tora Smith escorted her to the door, kissed her, and, returning, said, with a snap of her fingers:

"I don't care that for 'papa's report.' Jan is really too absurd."

"It's nice to see her——"

"Oh, delightful. I hate dutiful people!"

"You think just as much of your father."

"We happen to agree in our opinions, but papa always tells me to use my own judgment. Are you going to see Mr. Bannister?"

"Yes, I think so. He won't hurt me, and he may subscribe to the hunt."

"No; he may even improve you."

"Do I want it so badly, Miss Smith?"

"Yes. You're a weak-kneed man."

"Oh, I say! Look here, you must help me."

"Perhaps I will, if Mr. Bannister is not too engrossing."

"Now you're trying to draw me."

"Was I? And yet you looked pleased. Perhaps you think it a compliment."

"Isn't it one? It shows you think it worth while to——"

"It shows nothing of the kind," said Tora decisively.

Thus, for one reason or another, from one direction and another, there was converging on Littlehill a number of visitors. If your neighbor excites curiosity, it is a dull imagination that finds no plausible reason for satisfying it. Probably there was more in common than at first sight appeared between Mr. Delane's sense of duty, the Mayor's idea of official courtesy, Colonel Smith's contempt for narrowness of mind, Sir Harry Fulmer's care for the interests of the hunt, and Dr. Roberts' frank and undisguised eagerness to see and speak with Dale Bannister face to face.

CHAPTER IV.

A Quiet Sunday Afternoon.

TO dissolve public report into its component parts is never a light task. Analysis, as a rule, reveals three constituents: truth, embroidery, and mere falsehood; but the proportions vary infinitely. Denborough, which went to bed, to a man, at ten o'clock, or so soon after as it reached home from the public house, said that the people at Littlehill sat up very late; this was truth, at least relative truth, and that is all we can expect here. It said that they habitually danced and sang the night through; this was embroidery; they had once danced and sung the night through, when Dale had a party from London. It said that orgies—if the meaning of its nods, winks, and smiles may be summarized—went on at Littlehill; this was falsehood. Dale and his friends amused themselves, and it must be allowed that their enjoyment was not marred, but rather increased, by the knowledge that they did not command the respect of Denborough. They had no friends there. Why should they care for Denborough's approval? Denborough's approval was naught, whereas Denborough's disapproval ministered to the

pleasure most of us feel in giving gentle shocks to our neighbors' sense of propriety. No doubt an electric eel enjoys itself. But, after all, if the mere truth must be told, they were mild sinners at Littlehill, the leading spirits, Dale and Arthur Angell, being indeed young men whose antinomianism found a harmless issue in ink, and whose lawlessness was best expressed in meter. A cynic once married his daughter to a professed athiest, on the ground that the man could not afford to be other than an exemplary husband and father. Poets are not trammeled so tight as that, for, as Mrs. Delane remarked, there was Byron, and perhaps one or two more; yet, for the most part, she who marries a poet has nothing worse than nerves to fear. But a little lawlessness will go a long way in the right place,—for example, lawn-tennis on Sunday in the suburbs,—and the Littlehill party extorted a gratifying meed of curiosity and frowns, which were not entirely undeserved by some of their doings, and were more than deserved by what was told of their doings.

After luncheon on Sunday, Mr. Delane had a nap, as his commendable custom was. Then he took his hat and stick and set out for Littlehill. The Grange park stretches to the outskirts of the town, and borders in part on the grounds of Littlehill, so that the Squire had a pleasant walk under the cool shade of his own immemorial elms, and enjoyed the satisfaction of inspecting his own most excellent shorthorns. Reflecting on the elms and the shorthorns, and on the house, the acres, and the family that

were his, he admitted that he had been born to advantages and opportunities such as fell to the lot of a few men; and, inspired to charity by the distant church-bell sounding over the meadows, he acknowledged a corresponding duty of lenient judgment in respect of the less fortunate. Thus he arrived at Littlehill in a tolerant temper, and contented himself with an indulgent shake of the head when he saw the gravel fresh marked with horses' hoofs.

"Been riding instead of going to church, the young rascals," he said to himself, as he rang the bell.

A small, shrewd-faced man opened the door and ushered Mr. Delane into the hall. Then he stopped.

"If you go straight on, sir," said he, "through that baize door, and across the passage, and through the opposite door, you will find Mr. Bannister."

Mr. Delane's face expressed surprise.

"Mr. Bannister, sir," the man explained, "don't like visitors being announced, sir. If you would be so kind as walk in——"

It was a harmless whim, and the Squire nodded assent. He passed through the baize door, crossed the passage, and paused before opening the opposite door. The sounds which came from behind it arrested his attention. To the accompaniment of a gentle drumming noise, as if of sticks or umbrellas bumped against the floor, a voice was declaiming, or rather chanting, poetry. The voice rose and fell, and Mr. Delane could not distinguish

the words, until it burst forth triumphantly with the lines:

"Love grows hate for love's sake, life takes death for guide;
Night hath none but one red star—Tyrannicide."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Delane.

The voice dropped again for a few moments, then it hurled out:

"Down the way of Tsars awhile in vain deferred,
Bid the Second Alexander light the Third.
How for shame shall men rebuke them? how may we
Blame, whose fathers died and slew, to leave us free?"

The voice was interrupted and drowned by the crash of the pianoforte, struck with remorseless force, and another voice, the voice of a woman, cried, rising even above the crash:

"Now, one of your own, Dale."

"I think I'd better go in," thought Mr. Delane, and he knocked loudly at the door.

He was bidden to enter by the former of the two voices, and, going in, found himself in a billiard room. Five or six people sat round the wall on settees, each holding a cue, with which they were still gently strumming on the floor. A stout, elderly woman was at the piano, and a young man sat cross-legged in the middle of the billiard-table, with a book in one hand and a cigar in the other. There was a good deal of tobacco smoke in the room, and Mr. Delane did not at first distinguish the faces of the company.

The young man on the table uncoiled himself with great agility, jumped down, and came for-

ward to meet the newcomer with outstretched hands. As he outstretched them, he dropped the book and the cigar to the ground on either side of him.

"Ah, here you are! Delightful of you to come!" he cried. "Now, let me guess you!"

"Mr. Bannister?—Have I the pleasure?"

"Yes, yes. Now let's see—don't tell me your name."

He drew back a step, surveyed Mr. Delane's portly figure, his dignified carriage, his plain solid watch-chain, his square-toed strong boots.

"The Squire!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Delane, isn't it?"

"I am Mr. Delane."

"Good! You don't mind being guessed, do you? It's so much more amusing. What will you have?"

"Thank you, I've lunched, Mr. Bannister."

"Have you? We've just breakfasted—had a ride before, you know. But I must introduce you."

He searched the floor, picked up the cigar, looked at it regretfully, and threw it out of an open window.

"This," he resumed, waiving his hand toward the piano, "is Mrs. Ernest Hodge. This is Miss Fane, Mrs. Hodge's daughter—no, not by a first marriage; everybody suggests that. Professional name, you know—she sings. Hodge really wouldn't do, would it, Mrs. Hodge? This is Philip Hume. This is Arthur Angell, who writes verses—like me. This is—but I expect you know these gentlemen?"

Mr. Delane peered through the smoke which Philip Hume was producing from a long pipe, and to his amazement discerned three familiar faces: those of Dr. Roberts, the Mayor, and Alderman Johnstone. The Doctor was flushed and looked excited; the Mayor was a picture of dignified complacency; Johnstone appeared embarrassed and uncomfortable, for his bald head was embellished with a flowery garland. Dale saw Mr. Delane's eyes rest on this article.

"We always crown anybody who adds to our knowledge," he explained. "He gets a wreath of honor. The Alderman added to our knowledge of the expense of building a room. So Miss Fane crowned him."

An appreciative chuckle from the Mayor followed this explanation; he knocked the butt of his cue against the floor, and winked at Philip Hume.

The last-named, seeing that Mr. Delane was somewhat surprised at the company, came up to him and said:

"Come and sit down; Dale never remembers that anybody wants a seat. Here's an armchair."

Mr. Delane sat down next to Miss Fane, and noticed, even in his perturbation, that his neighbor was a remarkably pretty girl, with fair hair clustering in a thick mass on the nape of her neck, and large blue eyes which left gazing on Dale Bannister when their owner turned to greet him. Mr. Delane would have enjoyed talking to her, had not his soul been vexed at the presence of the three Denborough men.

One did not expect to meet the tradesmen of the town; and what business had the Doctor there? To spend Sunday in that fashion would not increase his popularity or his practice. And then that nonsense about the wreath! How undignified it was! it was even worse than yelling out Nihilistic verses by way of Sabbath amusement.

"I shall get away as soon as I can," he thought, "and I shall say a word to the Doctor."

He was called from his meditations by Miss Fane. She sat in a low chair with her feet on a stool, and now, tilting the chair back, she fixed her eyes on Mr. Delane, and asked:

"Are you shocked?"

No man likes to admit that he is shocked.

"I am not, but many people would be."

"I suppose you don't like meeting those men?"

"Hedger is an honest man in his way of life. I have no great opinion of Johnstone."

"This is your house, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"All the houses about here are yours, aren't they?"

"Most of them are, Miss Fane."

"Then you are a great man?"

The question was put so simply that Mr. Delane could not suspect a sarcastic intent.

"Only locally," he answered, smiling.

"Have you any daughters?" she asked.

"Yes; one."

"What is she like?"

"Fancy asking her father! I think Janet a beauty."

"Fair or dark?"

"Dark."

"Dale likes dark girls. Tall or short?"

"Tall."

"Good eyes?"

"I like them."

"Oh, that 'll do. Dale will like her;" and Miss Fane nodded reassuringly. Mr. Delane had not the heart to intimate his indifference to Dale Bannister's opinion of his daughter.

"Do you know this country?" he asked, by way of conversation.

"We've only been here a week, but we've ridden a good deal. We hold Dale on, you know."

"You are on a visit to Mr. Bannister?"

"Oh, yes, mother and I are here."

Mr. Delane could not help wondering whether their presence was such a matter of course as her tone implied, but before he could probe the matter further, he heard Dale exclaim:

"Oh, it's a wretched thing! Read it yourself, Roberts."

"Mount him on the rostrum," cried the young man who had been presented to Mr. Delane as Arthur Angell, and who had hitherto been engaged in an animated discussion with the Doctor.

Laughing, and only half resisting, the Doctor allowing himself to be hoisted on to the billiard-table, sat down, and announced in a loud voice:

"'Blood for Blood': by Dale Bannister."

The poem which bore this alarming title was perhaps the most outrageous of the author's works. It held up to ridicule and devoted to damnation every person and every institution which the Squire respected and worshiped. And the misguided young man declaimed it with sparkling eyes and emphasizing gestures, as though every wicked word of it were gospel. And to this man's charge were committed the wives and families of the citizens of Denborough! The Squire's self-respect demanded a protest. He rose with dignity, and went up to his host.

"Good-by, Mr. Bannister."

"What? you're not going yet? What? Does this stuff bore you?"

"It does not bore me. But I must add—excuse an old-fashioned fellow—that it does something worse."

"What? Oh, you're on the other side? Of course you are!"

"Whatever side I was, I could not listen to that. As an older man, let me give you a word of advice."

Dale lifted his hands in good-humored protest.

"Sorry you don't like it," he said. "Shut up, Roberts! If I'd known, we wouldn't have had it. But it's true—true—true."

The Doctor listened with sparkling eyes.

"I must differ utterly; I must indeed. Good-by, Mr. Bannister. Hedger?"

The Mayor started.

"I am walking into the town. Come with me."

The Mayor wavered. The Squire stood and waited for him.

"I didn't think of goin' yet, Mr. Delane, sir."

Dale watched the encounter with a smile.

"Your wife will expect you," said the Squire. "Come along."

The Mayor rose, ignoring Johnstone's grin and the amusement on the faces of the company.

"I'll come and look you up," said Dale, pressing the Squire's hand warmly. "Oh, it's all right. Tastes differ. I'm not offended. I'll come some day this week."

He showed them out, and, returning, said to the Doctor, "Roberts, you'll get into trouble."

"Nonsense!" said the Doctor. "What business is it of his?"

Dale had turned to Johnstone.

"Good-by," said he abruptly. "We close at five."

"I've 'ad a pleasant afternoon, sir."

"It will be deducted from your bill," answered Dale.

After ejecting Johnstone, he stood by the table, looking moodily at the floor.

"What's the matter, Dale?" asked Miss Fane.

"I suppose he thought we were beasts or or lunatics."

"Probably," said Philip Hume. "What then?"

"Well, yes," answered Dale, smiling again. "You're quite right, Phil. What then?"

CHAPTER V.

The Necessary Scapegoat.

IF men never told their wives anything, the condition of society would no doubt be profoundly modified, though it is not easy to forecast the precise changes. If a guess may be hazarded, it is probable that much less good would be done, and some less evil said: the loss of matter of interest for half the world may be allowed to sway the balance in favor of the present practice—a practice so universal that Mr. Delane, the Mayor, and Alderman Johnstone, one and all, followed it by telling their wives about their Sunday afternoon at Littlehill. Dr. Roberts, it is true, gave a meager account to his wife, but the narratives of the other three amply filled the gaps he left, and, as each of them naturally dwelt on the most remarkable features of their entertainment, it may be supposed that the general impression produced in Market Denborough did not fall short of the truth in vividness of color. The facts as to what occurred have been set down without extenuation and without malice: the province of Market Denborough society was to supply the inferences arising therefrom, and this task it fulfilled with no

grudging hand. Before eight-and-forty hours had passed, there were reports that the Squire had discovered a full-blown Saturnalia in process at Littlehill—and that in these scandalous proceedings the Mayor, Alderman Johnstone, and Dr. Roberts were participators.

Then ensued conduct on the part of the Mayor and the Alderman deserving of unmeasured scorn. They could not deny that dreadful things had been done and said, though they had not seen the deeds nor understood the words: their denial would have had no chance of credit. They could not venture to say that Squire Delane had done anything except manfully protest. They began by accusing one another in round terms, but each found himself so vulnerable that by an unholy tacit compact they agreed to exonerate one another. The Mayor allowed that Johnstone was not conspicuous in wickedness; Johnstone admitted that the Mayor had erred, if at all, only through weakness and good-nature. Public opinion demanded a sacrifice; and the Doctor was left to satisfy it. Everybody was of one mind in holding that Dr. Roberts had disgraced himself, and nobody was surprised to hear that the Squire's phaeton had been seen standing at his door for half an hour on Wednesday morning. The Squire was within, and was understood to be giving the Doctor a piece of his mind.

The Doctor was stiff-necked.

"It is entirely a private matter," said he, "and no one has a right to dictate to me."

"My dear Roberts, I spoke merely in your

own interest. It would ruin you if it became known that you held those atrocious opinions; and become known it must, if you openly ally yourself with this young man."

"I am not the servant of the people I attend. I may choose my own opinions."

"Yes, and they may choose their own doctor," retorted the Squire.

The two parted, almost quarreling. Perhaps they would have quite quarreled had not the Squire thought of Mrs. Roberts and the baby. He wondered that the Doctor did not think of them, too, but he seemed to Mr. Delane to be under such a spell that he thought of nothing but Dale Bannister. It was not as if Roberts were the only medical man in the place. There was young Doctor Spink—and he was a real M. D.—up the street, ready and eager to snap up stray patients. And Doctor Spink was a churchwarden. The Squire did not like him overmuch, but he found himself thinking whether it would not be well to send for him next time there was a case of illness at the Grange.

The Squire meditated, while others acted. On her walk the same afternoon, Ethel Roberts heard news which perturbed her. The Vicar's wife was ill and Dr. Spink had been sent for. The Vicar was a well-to-do man. He had a large family, which yet grew. He had been a constant and a valuable client of her husband's. And now Dr. Spink was sent for.

"Jim," she said, "did you know that Mrs. Gilkison was ill?

"Ill?" said the Doctor, looking up from "Sluggards." "No, I've heard nothing of it."

She came and leaned over his chair.

"They've sent for Dr. Spink," she said.

"What?" he exclaimed, dropping his beloved volume.

"Mrs. Hedger told me."

"Well, they can do as they like. I suppose his 'Doctor' is the attraction."

"Do you think it's that, dear?"

"What else can it be?—unless it's a mere freak."

"Well, Jim, I thought—I thought perhaps that the Vicar had heard about—about—Little-hill. Yes, I know it's very stupid and narrow, dear—but still——"

The Doctor swore under his breath.

"I can't help it if the man's an ass," he said.

Ethel smiled patiently.

"It's a pity to offend people, Jim, dear, isn't it?"

"Are you against me too, Ethel?"

"Against you? You know I never would be, but——"

"Then do let us leave Denborough gossip alone. Fancy Denborough taking on itself to disapprove of Dale Bannister! It's too rich!"

Ethel sighed. Denborough's disapproval was no doubt a matter of indifference to Dale Bannister: it meant loss of bread and butter to James Roberts and his house.

Meanwhile Dale Bannister, all unconscious of the dread determinations of the Vicar, pursued his way in cheerful unconcern. People came

and went. Arthur Angell returned to his haunts rather dissatisfied with the quiet of Littlehill, but rejoicing to have found in the Doctor one thorough-going believer. Mrs. Hodge, her daughter, and Philip Hume seemed to be permanent parts of the household. Riding was their chief amusement. They would pass down High Street, Dale on his ancient mare, with Nellie and Philip by his side, laughing and talking merrily, Dale's own voice being very audible as he pointed out, with amusement a trifle too obvious to be polite, what struck him as remarkable in Denborough ways of life.

Philip, however, whom Mr. Delane had described to his wife as the only apparently sane person at Littlehill, was rather uneasy in his mind about Roberts.

"You'll get that fellow disliked, Dale," he said one morning, "if you don't take care."

"I? What have I to do with it?" asked Dale.

"They'll think him unsafe, if they see him with you."

"He needn't come unless he likes. He's not a bad fellow, only he takes everything so precious seriously."

"He thinks you do, judging by your books."

"Oh, I do by fits. By the way, I have a fit now! Behold, I will write! Nellie! Where's Nellie?"

Nellie Fane came at his call.

"Sit down just opposite me, and look at me. I am going to write. The editor of the *Cynosure* begs for twenty lines—no more; twenty lines—

fifty pounds! Now, Nellie, inspire me, and you shall have a new hat out of it. No, look at me!"

Nellie sat down and gazed at him, obediently.

"Two pound ten a line; not bad for a young 'un," he pursued. "They say Byron wrote on gin and water. I write on your eyes, Nellie—much better."

"You're not writing at all—only talking nonsense."

"I'm just beginning."

"Look here, Dale, why don't you keep the Doctor——" began Philip.

"Oh, hang the Doctor! I'd just got an idea. Look at me, Nellie!"

Philip shrugged his shoulders, and Dr. Roberts dropped out of discussion.

The twenty lines were written, though they were never considered one of his masterpieces, then Dale rose with a sigh of relief.

"Now for lunch, and then I'm going to return Mr. Delane's call."

"I thought we were to ride," said Nellie disappointedly.

"Well, won't you come?"

"Don't be absurd!"

"Mightn't she come, Phil?"

"Mrs. Delane has not called, has she?" inquired Philip, as though for information.

"Of course I shan't go, Dale. You must go alone."

"What a nuisance! I shall have to walk. I daren't trust myself to that animal alone."

After luncheon he started, walking by the same way by which Mr. Delane had come.

He reached the lodge of the Grange; a courtesying child held open the gate, and he passed along under the immemorial elms, returning a cheery good-day to the gardeners, who paused in their work to touch their hats with friendly deference. The deference was wrong, of course, but the friendliness pleased him, and even the deference seemed somehow in keeping with the elms and with the sturdy old red-brick mansion, with its coat of arms and defiant Norman motto over the principal door. Littlehill was a pleasant house, but it had none of the ancient dignity of Dirkham, and Dale's quick brain was suddenly struck with a new understanding of how such places bred the men they did. He had had a fancy for a stay in the country; it would amuse him, he thought, to study country life; that was the meaning of his coming to Littlehill. Well, Dirkham summed up one side of country life, and he would be glad to study it.

Mr. Delane was not at home—he had gone to Petty Sessions; and Dale, with regret, for he wanted to see the inside of the house, left his name—as usual he had forgotten to bring a card—and turned away. As he turned, a pony carriage drew up and a girl jumped out. Dale drew back to let her pass, raising his hat. The servant said a word to her, and when he had gone some ten or fifteen yards, he heard his name called.

"Oh, Mr. Bannister, do come in! I expect papa back every minute, and he will be so sorry

to miss you. Mamma is up in London; but I hope you'll come in."

Dale had no idea of refusing the invitation given so cordially. He had been sorry to go away before, and the sight of Janet Delane made him more reluctant still. He followed her into the oak-paneled hall, hung with pictures of dead Delanes and furnished with couches and easy-chairs.

"Well," she said, after tea was brought, "and what do you think of us?"

"I have not seen very much of you yet."

"As far as you have gone? And be candid."

"You are very restful."

She made a little grimace.

"You mean very slow?"

"Indeed I don't! I think you very interesting."

"You find us interesting, but slow. Yes, you meant that, Mr. Bannister, and it's not kind."

"Have your revenge by telling me what you think of me."

"Oh, we find you interesting, too. We're all talking about you."

"And slow?"

"No, certainly not slow," she said, with a smile and a glance: the glance should be described, if it were describable, but it was not.

Dale, however, understood it, for he replied, laughing:

"They've been prejudicing you against me."

"I don't despair of you. I think you may be reformed. But I'm afraid you're very bad just now."

"Why do you think that? From what your father said?"

"Partly. Partly also because Colonel Smith and Tora—do you know them?—are so enthusiastic about you."

"Is that a bad sign?"

"Terrible. They are quite revolutionary. So are you, aren't you?"

"Not in private life."

"But of course," she asked, with serious eyes, "you believe what you write?"

"Well, I do; but you pay writers a compliment by saying 'of course.'"

"Oh, I hope not! Anything is better than insincerity."

"Even my opinions?"

"Yes. Opinions may be changed, but not natures, you know."

She was still looking at him with serious, inquiring eyes. The eyes were very fine eyes. Perhaps that was the reason why Dale thought the last remark so excellent. He said nothing, and she went on:

"People who are clever and—and great, you know, ought to be so careful that they are right, oughtn't they?"

"Oh, a rhymer rhymes as the fit takes him," answered he, with affected modesty.

"I wouldn't believe that of you. You wouldn't misuse your powers like that."

"You have read my poetry?"

"Some of it." She paused and added, with a little blush for her companion: "There was some papa would not let me read."

A man may not unreasonably write what a young girl's father may very reasonably not like her to read. Nevertheless, Dale Bannister felt rather uncomfortable.

"Those were the shocking political ones, I suppose?" he asked.

"No; I read most of those. These were against religion and——"

"Well?"

"Morality, papa said," she answered, with the same grave look of inquiry.

Dale rose and held out his hand, saying petulantly:

"Good-by, Miss Delane. You evidently don't think me fit to enter your house."

"Oh, now I have made you angry. I have no right to speak about it, and, of course, I know nothing about it. Only——"

"Only what?"

"Some things are right and some are wrong, aren't they?"

"Oh, granted—if we could only agree which were which."

"As to some we have been told. And I don't think that about you at all—I really don't. Do wait till papa comes."

Dale sat down again. He had had his lecture; experience told him that a lecture from such lecturers is tolerably often followed by a petting, and the pettings were worth the lectures. In this instance he was disappointed. Janet did not pet him, though she displayed much friendliness, and he took his leave (for the Squire did not appear) feeling somewhat put out.

Approbation and applause were dear to this man, who seemed to spend his energies in courting blame and distrust; whatever people thought of his writings, he wished them to be fascinated by him. He was not sure that he had fascinated Miss Delane.

"I should like to see more of her," he thought. "She's rather an odd girl."

CHAPTER VI.

Littlebill Goes into Society.

MR. DELANE'S late return from his public duties was attributable simply to Colonel Smith's obstinancy. He and the Colonel sat together on the bench, and very grievously did they quarrel over the case of a man who had been caught in the possession of the body of a fresh-killed hare. They differed first as to the policy of the law, secondly as to its application, thirdly as to its vindication; and when the Vicar of Denborough, who was a county justice and present with them, sided with the Squire on all these points, the Colonel angrily denounced the reverend gentleman as a disgrace, not only to the judicial bench, but even to his own cloth. All this took time, as did also the Colonel's cross-examination of the constable in charge of the case, and it was evening before the dispute was ended, and a fine imposed. The Colonel paid the fine, and thus everyone, including the law and the prisoner, was in the end satisfied.

Mr. Delane and the Colonel, widely and fiercely as they differed on every subject under the sun, were very good friends, and they rode home together in the dusk of a September

evening, for their roads lay the same way for some distance. Presently they fell in with Sir Harry Fulmer, who had been to see Dale Bannister, and, in his absence, had spent the afternoon with Nellie Fane and Philip Hume.

"Hume's quite a good fellow," he declared; "quiet, you know, and rather sarcastic, but quite a gentleman. And Miss Fane—I say, have you seen her, Colonel?"

"By the way, who is Miss Fane?" asked the Squire.

"Oh, she acts, or sings, or something. Awfully jolly girl, and uncommon pretty. Don't you think so, Squire?"

"Yes, I did, Harry. But why is she staying there?"

"Really, Delane," said the Colonel, "what possible business is that of yours?"

"I've called on Bannister, and he's going to return my call. I think it's a good deal of business of mine."

"Well!" exclaimed the Colonel; "for sheer uncharitableness and the thinking of all evil, give me a respectable Christian man like yourself, Delane."

"Oh, it's all right," said Sir Harry cheerfully. "The old lady, Mrs. What's-her-name, is there."

"I hope it is," said the Squire. "Bannister has himself to thank for any suspicions which may be aroused."

"Suspicions? Bosh!" said the Colonel. "They are all coming to dine with me to-morrow. I met Bannister and asked him. He

said he had friends, and I told him to bring the lot. Will you and Mrs. Delane come, Squire?"

"My wife's away, thanks."

"Then bring Janet."

"Hum! I think I'll wait."

"Oh, as you please. You'll come, Harry?"

Sir Harry was delighted to come.

"Tora was most anxious to know them," the Colonel continued, "and I hate ceremonious ways. There'll be nobody else, except the Doctor and his wife."

"You haven't asked Hedger and Johnstone, have you?" inquired the Squire. "They're friends of Bannister's. I met them at his house."

"I haven't, but I don't know why I shouldn't."

"Still you won't," said Sir Harry, with a laugh.

The Colonel knew that he would not, and changed the subject.

"This is a great occasion," said Philip Hume at afternoon tea next day. "To-night we are to be received into county society."

"Is Colonel Smith 'county society'?" asked Nellie.

"Yes. The Mayor told me so. The Colonel is a Radical, and a bad one at that, but the poor man comes of good family and is within the toils."

"I expect he really likes it," said Nellie. "I should."

"Are you nervous?" inquired Philip.

Nellie laughed and colored.

"I really am a little. I hope I shall behave properly. Mother is in a dreadful state."

"Where is Mrs. Hodge?"

"Putting some new lace on her gown."

"And Dale?"

"He's writing. Mr. Hume, has he told you anything about his visit yesterday?"

"Yes. He says he met an angel."

"Oh, that accounts for the title."

"What title?"

"Why, I went and looked over his shoulder, and saw he was beginning some verses, headed, 'To a Pretty Saint.' I always look, you know, but this time he snatched the paper away."

"'To a Pretty Saint'? Dear, dear! Perhaps he meant you, Nellie."

Miss Fane shook her head.

"He meant Miss Delane, I'm sure," she said dolefully. "I hope Miss Smith is just exactly a county young lady—you know what I mean. I want to see one."

"Do you contemplate remodeling yourself?"

"I'm sure Dale will like that sort of girl."

Philip looked at her sideways. He thought of telling her that "county young ladies" did not proclaim all their thoughts. But then he reflected that he would not.

The Littlehill party arrived at Mount Pleasant, the Colonel's residence, in the nick of time; and Mrs. Hodge sailed in to dinner on her host's arm in high good humor. Dale, as the great man and the stranger, escorted Tora,

Philip Hume Mrs. Roberts, and Sir Harry fell to Nellie's lot.

Mrs. Hodge was an amusing companion. She did not dally at the outworks of acquaintance, but closed at once into intimacy, and before half an hour was gone, she found herself trying hard not to call the Colonel "my dear," and to remember to employ the usual prefixes to the names of the company. The Colonel was delighted; was he at last escaping from the stifling prison of conventionality and breathing a freer air?

Unhappily, just in proportion as good cheer and good fellowship put Mrs. Hodge at her ease, and made her more and more to the Colonel's taste, her daughter's smothered uneasiness grew more intense. Nellie had borne herself with an impossible dignity and distance of manner toward Sir Harry, in the fear lest Sir Harry should find her wanting in the characteristics of good society, and her frigidity was increased by her careful watch on her mother's conduct. Sir Harry was disappointed. As he could not sit by Tora Smith, he had consoled himself with the prospect of some fun with "little Miss Fane." And little Miss Fane held him at arms'-length. He determined to try to break down her guard.

"How did you manage to shock the Squire so?" he asked.

"Was he shocked? I didn't know."

"You were there, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes. Well, I suppose it was Mr. Bannister's poetry."

"Why should that shock him?" asked Sir Harry, who knew very well. "By Jove, I wish I could write some like it!"

She turned to him with sudden interest.

"Do you admire Dale's writings?"

"Awfully," said Sir Harry. "Don't you?"

"Of course *I* do, but I didn't know whether you would. Do you know Miss Delane?"

"Yes, very well."

"Do you like her?"

"Oh, yes. I have known her all my life, and I like her. She frightens me a little, you know."

"Does she? How?"

"She expects such a lot of a fellow. Have you met her?"

"No. D—Mr. Bannister has. He likes her."

"I expect she blew him up, didn't she?"

"Oh, I shouldn't think so. Dale wouldn't like that."

"Depends how it's done," observed Sir Harry. "Don't you ever blow him up?"

"Of course not. I'm much too—I look up to him too much."

They were interrupted by the Colonel's voice. He was saying, with much energy:

"Ability we don't expect in a Government office, but honesty one might hope for."

"Just what Hodge used to say of old Pratt," said Mrs. Hodge.

"I beg pardon?" said the Colonel.

"Pratt was his manager, you know—my husband's."

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Nellie, you remember your father throwing

down that two pound ten on the table, and saying, 'Well, I'm——'"

"No, mother, I don't. Do you think I could learn to hunt, Sir Harry?"

"Of course you could, in no time."

"Does Miss Delane?"

"And Pratt said that if Hodge couldn't play the king at two pound ten a week,—though that's hard living, my dear,—I beg pardon—Colonel——"

The Colonel bowed courteously. Nellie grew very red.

"Why, bantam-cocks had risen since his day, and that was all about it." And Mrs. Hodge emptied her glass and beamed pleasantly on the company.

Suddenly Dale Bannister began to laugh gently. Tora Smith turned an inquiring look in his direction.

"What is it, Mr. Bannister?"

"I saw your father's butler looking at my friend Mrs. Hodge."

"What nonsense! Simmons is not allowed to look at anyone."

"Isn't he? Why not?"

"No good servant does."

Dale smiled.

"I know what you mean," Tora continued; "but surely while they're actually waiting, Mr. Bannister, we can't treat them quite like ourselves? At any other time, of course——"

"You'd take a walk with them?"

"They'd be horribly uncomfortable if I did," she answered, laughing.

"That's the worst of it," said he.

"Do you think us great shams?"

"I have come to learn, not to criticise."

"We want a leader," said Tora, with pretty earnestness.

"Haven't you one?"

"Sir Harry Fulmer is our leader, but we're not contented with him. He's a very mild Radical. Won't you come to our help?"

"I expect I should be too extreme the other way."

"Oh, I love people who are extreme—in my direction, I mean."

"Well, then, try the Doctor."

"Mr. Roberts? Oh, he's hardly prominent enough; we must have somebody of position. Now, what are you laughing at, Mr. Bannister?"

The gentleman to whom they referred sat looking on at them with no great pleasure, though they found one another entertaining enough to prevent them noticing him. Dale Bannister said that his new friend took life seriously, and the charge was too true for the Doctor's happiness. Dale Bannister had taken hold of his imagination. He expected Dale to do all he would give his life to see done, but could not do himself. The effect of Dale was to be instantaneous, enormous, transforming Denborough and its inhabitants. He regarded the poet much as a man might look upon a benevolent volcano, did such a thing exist in the order of nature. His function was, in the Doctor's eyes, to pour forth the burning lava of truth and justice, wherewith the ignorance,

prejudice, and cruelty of the present order should be consumed and smothered; let the flood be copious, scorching, and unceasing! The Doctor could do little more than hail the blessed shower and declare its virtues; but that he was ready to do at any cost. And the volcano would not act! The eruptions were sadly intermittent. The hero, instead of going forth to war, was capering nimbly in a lady's chamber, to the lascivious pleasing of a lute; that is to say, he was talking trifles to Tora Smith, with apparent enjoyment, forgetful of his mission, ignoring the powers of darkness around. No light-spreading saying, no sword-flash had come from him all the evening. He was fiddling while Rome was—waiting for the burning it needed so badly.

Perhaps it was a woebegone look about the Doctor that made Philip Hume take the chair next him after dinner, while Dale was, still as if in play, emitting anarchist sparks for the Colonel's entertainment.

"Is it possible," asked the Doctor in low, half-angry tones, "that he thinks these people are any good—that they are sincere or thorough in the matter? He's wasting his time."

"Well, well, my dear fellow, we must all dine, whatever our opinions."

"Oh, yes; we must dine, while the world starves."

"The bow can't be always stretched," said Philip, with a slight smile.

"You don't think, Hume, do you, that he's getting any less—less in earnest, you know?"

"Oh, he wrote a scorcher this very morning."

"Did he? That's good news. Where is it to appear?"

"I don't know. He didn't write it on commission."

"His poems have such magnificent restlessness, haven't they? I can't bear to see him idle."

"Poor Dale! You must give him some holidays. He likes pleasure like the rest of us."

The Doctor sighed impatiently, and Philip looking at him anxiously, laid a hand on his arm.

"Roberts," he said, "there is no need that you should be ground to powder."

"I don't understand."

"I hope you never will. Your wife doesn't look very strong. Why don't you give her a change?"

"A change? How am I to afford a change? Besides, who wants a change? What change do most workers get?"

"Hang most workers! Your wife wants a change."

"I haven't got the money, anyhow."

"Then there's an end of it."

The Colonel rose, and they made for the drawing room.

Philip detained his companion for a moment.

"Well?" said the Doctor, feeling the touch on his arm.

"For God's sake, old fellow, go slow," said Philip, pressing his arm, and looking at him with an appealing smile.

CHAPTER VII.

"To a Pretty Saint."

WHEN Mrs. Delane came back from London, she was met with a question of the precise kind on which she felt herself to be no mean authority. It was a problem of propriety, of etiquette, and of the usages of society, and Mrs. Delane attacked it with a due sense of its importance and with the pleasure of an expert. It arose out of Dale Bannister's call at the Grange. Dale had been accustomed, when a lady found favor in his eyes, to inform her of the gratifying news through the medium of a set of verses, more or less enthusiastic and rhapsodic in their nature. The impulse to follow his usual practice was strong on him after meeting Janet Delane, and issued in the composition of that poem called "To a Pretty Saint," the title of which Nellie had seen. He copied it out fair, and was about to put it in the post when a thought suddenly struck him. Miss Delane was not quite like most of his acquaintances. It was perhaps possible that she might think his action premature, or even impertinent, and that she might deem it incumbent on her to resent being called either a saint or pretty by a friend of one inter-

view's standing. Dale was divided between his newborn doubt of his own instinct of what was permissible and his great reluctance to doom his work to suppression. He decided to consult Philip Hume, who was, as he knew, more habituated to the social atmosphere of places like Denshire.

"Eh? what?" said Philip, who was busily engaged in writing a newspaper article. "Written a poem to a girl? All right. I'll listen presently."

"I don't want you to listen. I want your advice as to whether to send it or not."

"If you've wasted your time writing the thing,—by the way, take care the Doctor doesn't hear of it,—you may as well send it."

"The question is, whether she'll be offended."

"I'm glad it isn't more important, because I'm busy."

"Look here! Stop that anonymous stabber of yours and listen. It's to Miss Delane."

Philip stopped in the middle of a particularly vicious paragraph of the "stabber," and looked up with amusement on his face.

"It's a perfectly—you know—suitable poem," pursued Dale. "The only question is, will she think it a liberty?"

"Oh, send it. They like getting 'em;" and Philip took up his pen again.

"You don't know the sort of girl she is."

"Then what the deuce is the good of asking me? Ask Nellie."

"No, I shan't," said Dale shortly.

Thus thrown, by his friend's indifference, on his own judgment, Dale made up his mind to send the verses,—he could not deny himself the pleasure,—but, half alarmed at his own audacity, which feeling was a new one in him, he "hedged" by inclosing with them a letter of an apologetic character. Miss Delane was not to suppose that he took the liberty of referring to her in the terms of his title: the little copy of verses had merely been suggested by a remark she made. He had failed to find an answer on the spot. Would she pardon him for giving his answer now in this indirect way? —and so forth.

The verses, with their accompanying letter, were received by Janet, and Janet had no doubt of what she did feel about them, but some considerable doubt as to what she ought to feel; so she carried them to her mother. Mrs. Delane put on her *pince-nez* and read the documents in the case.

"I'm sure he didn't mean to be—anything but what's nice, mamma," said Janet.

"I dare say not, my dear. The question is, whether the young man knows his manners. Let's see."

After careful perusal, during which Janet watched her mother's face with some anxiety, Mrs. Delane delivered judgment.

"There's no positive harm in them," she said, "and I don't think we need take any actual steps. Still, Janet, he is evidently to be treated with discretion."

"How do you mean, mamma?"

"Well, he isn't in need of encouragement, is he? He's not backward in making friends."

"I suppose not. May I keep them?"

"Keep them? Do you want to keep them?"

"Not particularly, dear," answered Janet. I—I thought he meant me to."

"No doubt. Write a civil note, dear, thank him for letting you see them, and return them inclosed."

Janet was a little reluctant to part with her autograph manuscript,—not because of its pecuniary value, though that was more than a trifle, had she known, but because such things are pleasant possessions to show to envious friends,—but she did as she was told. She did not, however, feel herself bound altogether to smother her pride or to make a secret of the tribute she had received. Tora Smith heard the story with evident amusement, and, thinking that others would share her appreciation of it, relieved the somewhat uphill course of Mrs. Hodge's call by a repetition of it: whereby it happened that Nellie Fane came to know, not only that Dale had written verses to Miss Delane and sent them, but also that Miss Delane had returned the offering. She told Philip the latter fact, and the two ventured to rally the poet on the occurrence. Dale took their action very badly, and his displeasure soon reduced Nellie to apologies. Philip was less sensitive.

"D. W. T., by Jove!" he remarked. "Quite like old times, Dale!"

Dale muttered something about "infernal chatter."

"You will soon be in a position to publish a volume of 'Rejected Addresses.'"

"Not at all," said Dale. "It's simply that she didn't understand I meant her to keep them."

"Oh, that's her delicate way of snubbing you, my boy."

"What the deuce do you know about it, Phil? You never wrote verses in your life. Don't you agree with me, Nellie?"

"Miss Smith said Miss Delane thought she had better not keep them."

"I knew that girl was a gossip directly I set eyes on her."

"You're naturally hurt, old fellow, but——"

"Go to the deuce! Look here, I'll bet you a fiver she takes them back and keeps them."

"Done!" said Philip, and Dale seized his hat.

"Why does he want her to take them?" asked Nellie.

"Vanity, my dear, vanity. I suppose he's accustomed to having his verses laid up in lavender. Is that what you do with yours?"

"He never wrote me any," answered Nellie in a tone of superlative indifference.

It being only two o'clock, Dale felt he could not yet go to the Grange. He made a detour by the town, on pretense of buying stamps; and, the stars fighting with him, outside the Mayor's shop he saw Janet talking to the Mayor himself.

"Thank you, Miss Delane, miss," said the Mayor. "Mrs. Hedger is doin' nicely. She had a bit of feverishness about her, but Dr. Spink's treated her wonderful."

"Dr. Spink? I thought you went to Dr. Roberts?"

"I did, miss, but—— Well, things come round to me, miss, being a center like."

"What things?"

"Well, you may not have heard, miss, of the things that—— Good-mornin', Mr. Bannister, sir, good-mornin'. A fine day. Anything in our line, sir?"

"Good-morning, Mr. Mayor," said Dale. "Ah, Miss Delane, how do you do?"

His coming interrupted Janet's investigations into the affairs of the Doctor, and she took her leave of the Mayor, Dale assuming permission to walk with her. He ought to have asked, no doubt, thought Janet, but it would be making too much of it to tell him so.

They had hardly started when he turned to her:

"Why did you send back my verses?"

"I could hardly venture to keep them, could I?"

"Why not?"

"On so slight an acquaintance! It was very kind of you to let me see them before they were published."

"They're not going to be published."

"Oh, you must publish them. They're so very pretty."

"Didn't you think I meant you to keep them?"

"I should have been very conceited if I had, shouldn't I?"

"Well, they were for you—not to be published. If you don't like them, they'll be burned, that's all."

Janet stole a glance at his face; he looked like a petulant Apollo—so she thought.

"That would be a pity," she said gravely; "but I don't think I ought to keep them."

"Why not?"

Socrates is reported to have said that nothing is reasonable which cannot be stated in a reasonable form. Miss Janet Delane would have dissented.

"Of course I like them very much. But—well, we haven't known each other very long, Mr. Bannister."

"You mean it was impertinent?"

"Oh, no. I thought your letter perfect—I did really. But mamma thought——"

"Oh!" said Dale, with brightening face. "You would have kept them?"

"That's not the question," said Janet, smiling. It was pleasant to see Apollo looking less petulant. "But what would people say if they heard I had poems of Mr. Dale Bannister's about me? I should be thought a dangerous person."

"I'll write some which you would like to have."

"I am sure you could, if you only would. Fancy, if you wrote really noble verses—worthy of you!"

"Well, I will, if it will please you."

"Nonsense, Mr. Bannister! There's no question of pleasing me: it doesn't matter—well, I mean, then, the great thing is to do justice to yourself."

"I ought to have some encouragement in well-doing," said Dale plaintively.

She shook her head with a smile, and he went on:

"I wish you'd come to Littlehill and see the house. I've improved it tremendously."

"Oh, you must invite mamma."

"Would Mrs. Delane come?"

This question was a little awkward, for Mrs. Delane, after cross-examining Tora Smith closely as to Mrs. Hodge and her daughter, had announced that she would not go.

"A bachelor doesn't entertain ladies, does he?"

"I should like to; and there are some ladies——" A sudden thought struck him, and he stopped. He looked so pointedly at Janet that, to her intense annoyance, she felt herself blushing. She made the grave mistake of changing the conversation abruptly.

"How did you like the Smiths?"

"Oh, pretty well."

"I should have thought you would have got on tremendously well together."

"Oh, I don't know. I think I like people to be one thing or the other, and the Smiths are halfway housers."

"You're very ungrateful."

"Oh, they only asked us as a demonstration," said Dale, who had some acuteness.

Janet laughed, but her companion was moodily prodding the ground with his stick as he walked along.

They reached a cottage where she had a visit to pay, and she bade him good-by.

"Then you won't have the verses?"

"I think not."

"Very well, then, here goes;" and he took the paper out of his pocket and tore it to bits. The fragments fluttered to the ground.

"How foolish!" she said. "I dare say they were worth a lot of money—but, then, you can write them out again."

"Do you think I shall?" he asked, grinding the fragments into the mud.

"I'm afraid you will do nothing wise," she said, giving him her hand. Yet the extravagance rather pleased her.

Until Dale reached his own house it did not strike him that he had lost his bet. Philip quickly reminded him, and laughed mercilessly when a crumpled five-pound note was thrown at his head by his angry friend.

"I tell you she wanted to keep them," said Dale unjustifiably.

"Then why didn't she?" asked Nellie.

"Mrs. Delane didn't approve of it."

"I expect Mrs. Delane doesn't approve of you at all," remarked Philip.

"No, nor of my friends either," answered Dale, flinging himself into a chair.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Hodge, who sat by, "her opinion will neither make us nor mar us."

"How have we had the misfortune to offend the lady?" inquired Philip. "She has never seen us."

"Here's your tea, Dale," said Nellie. "Are you tired?"

"Yes, a little. Thanks, Nellie."

"Was she looking nice, Dale?"

"I didn't see her."

"I mean Miss Delane."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. I didn't look much."

CHAPTER VIII.

An Indiscreet Disciple.

SUMMER wore away, and autumn came in brief, calm radiance, and passed; winter began to threaten. At Denborough one quiet day followed another, each one noticeable for little, but in the aggregate producing some not unimportant changes at Littlehill. Dale Bannister had begun to work hard and to work in solitude; the inspiration of Nellie's eyes seemed either unnecessary or ineffectual. Moreover, his leisure hours were now largely spent in visiting at houses in the neighborhood. He did not neglect his guests, but whenever their engagements occupied them, instead of wandering about alone or enjoying the humors of the High Street, as he had been prone to do in the early days of his sojourn, he would go over to Mount Pleasant, or to the Grange, or to Sir Harry Fulmer's, and he was becoming learned in country lore and less scornful of country ways. The Doctor was a rare visitor now, and, when he came, it generally fell to Philip Hume's lot to entertain him. Philip did his duty loyally, but it was dreary work, for Roberts' conversation, at their meetings, consisted, in the main,

of diatribes against Dale Bannister. He would declare that Dale's conduct, in maintaining friendly relations with the gentry of the neighborhood, was in flagrant contradiction to the views he had proclaimed in his writings. Philip shrugged his shoulders, and said that some men were better than their writings, some worse, but no man the same as his writings; the prose must ever be allowed for: and at this the angry man often turned his back on the house with an imprecation on half-heartedness. For the rest, Philip's hands were not very full, and he and Nellie Fane found time for long expeditions together, which would have been more cheerful had it not been for Nellie's scrupulous determination to ignore the absence of the third member of the old trio. One day Philip's idle steps led him through the town on the search for matter of amusement. He was caught in a shower, and took refuge in the Mayor's shop, knowing that his Worship always had time for a gossip. He was not disappointed. The Mayor entertained him with a graphic account of the last assault on Mr. Delane's position as member for the Denborough division, and of his own recent re-election to his high office. Philip congratulated him on the latter event, and asked in curiosity:

"And what are your politics, Mr. Mayor?"

"I hold as a man in my position should have no politics, not party politics, Mr. Hume, sir."

"Well, there's something to be said for that."

"After all, we know what they are, sir. One out and the other in—that's what they are, sir."

"But you said Mrs. Hedger canvassed for the Squire."

"So she did, sir. Now, my daughter is on the Liberal side; she and Miss Smith used to go a-drivin' round together."

"A sad division of opinion, Mr. Mayor."

"Well, we can differ without disagreein', sir. Besides," he added, with something like a wink, "customers differ too."

"Most true."

"Business is business, sir, especially with a growin' fam'ly. I always think of my fam'ly, Mr. Hume, and how I should leave 'em if I was took—taken."

"A man's first duty, Mr. Mayor."

"You wouldn't catch me goin' on like this young Roberts."

"Why, what's he been up to now?" asked Philip uneasily.

"You aint seen the *Standard*, sir?" The Mayor, of course, meant the *East Denshire Standard*, not the London paper of the same name.

"No."

"Well, last week they printed the Vicar's sermon on 'The Work of Christianity in the World.' A fine sermon it was, sir. I heard it, being a Church of England man. Mrs. Hedger goes to Chapel."

"'Customers differ too,'" thought Philip, smiling.

"Well, as I was sayin', Jones of the *Standard* got the Vicar to give it 'im, and it came out, with a leadin' article of Jones' crackin' it up."

"But how does the Doctor——"

"This week, sir," continued the Mayor, shaking an impressive forefinger, "in the *Chronicle* —that's the Liberal paper, sir—there's a letter from the Doctor—two columns—just abusin' the Church and the parsons, and the 'ole—whole thing, fit to—well, I never did!"

"Hum! Rather rash, isn't it?"

"Rash, Mr. Hume, sir? It's madness, that's what it is, sir. He talks about 'pestilent priests,' and I don't know what all, sir, and ends with quotin' thirty or forty lines from a poem called, I think, 'The Arch Apostates' —would that be it, sir?—by Mr. Bannister."

"No! does he, by Jove?" said Philip, slapping his thigh.

"And the po'try, sir, is worse than the Doctor's own stuff, sir, beggin' your pardon as a friend of Mr. Bannister."

"I know the lines. They're some of the hottest he's ever done."

"Mr. Bannister, of course, can afford it, sir,—his opinions are what he pleases,—but the Doctor, sir!"

"So the fat's in the fire?"

"Just the very worst time it could ha' come out, sir. The Guardians over at Dirkham meet to-morrow to elect their medical officer. I'm afraid as they won't re-elect Dr. Roberts, sir, and there was more than one down at the Delane Arms sayin' they'd had the last to do with him."

Philip parted from his informant in much concern for Roberts, and in no small amuse-

ment at the public placarding of "The Arch Apostates." "*Surtout, point de zele,*" he could imagine Dale saying to his infatuated disciple.

On returning home, however, he found the poet saying much harder things of, if not to, Mr. Roberts. Dale had been calling at the Smiths'. The Colonel, while shaking his head over Roberts' impudence, had applauded his opinions, and was, above all, enchanted with the extract from Dale's poem, which he had never hitherto read. His pleasure was, as he told Dale, greatly increased by finding that the letter and the quotation had fallen like a bomb-shell on the Grange household.

"The Squire was furious. Mrs. Delane said she had no idea you had done anything so bad as that; and little Janet sat and looked as if someone had knocked down the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was splendid! Gad, sir, you've waked 'em up."

These congratulations had the effect of reducing the poet almost to a frenzy. "What business," he demanded, "has the fellow to quote me in support of his balderdash without my leave?"

"My dear fellow, your works are the possession of the nation," said Philip, smiling, as he lit a cigar.

"It's an infernal liberty!" fumed Dale.

"You light the fire, and blame it for blazing," said Philip.

"One doesn't want to shove one's views down people's throats,"

"Doesn't one? One used to."

"I shall write and disclaim any responsibility."

"For the poem?"

"For its publication, of course."

"That won't do you much good."

The Mayor's forecast, based on a lifelong observation of his neighbors, proved only too correct. Dr. Spink entered the lists against Roberts, and was elected by every vote save one. Sir Harry Fulmer, in blind and devoted obedience to Tora Smith, voted for Roberts; the rest, headed by the Squire, installed his rival in his place; and the Squire, having sternly done his duty, sat down and wrote a long and friendly letter of remonstrance and explanation to his erring friend.

As misfortune followed misfortune, the Doctor set his teeth, and dared fate to do her worst. He waited a few days, hoping to be comforted by a word of approval from his master; none came. At last he determined to seek out Dale Bannister, and was about to start when his wife came in and gave him the new issue of the *Chronicle*. Ethel Roberts was pale and weary-looking, and she glanced anxiously at her husband.

"I am going up to Littlehill," he said.

"Have you done your round, dear?"

"My round doesn't take long nowadays. Maggs will give me fifteen pounds for the pony: you know we don't want him now."

"No, Jim, and we do want fifteen pounds."

"What's that?"

"The *Chronicle*, dear. There's — a letter from Mr. Bannister."

"Is there? Good! Let's see what Bannister has to say to these bigoted idiots."

He opened the paper, and in the middle of the front page read:

A DISCLAIMER FROM MR. BANNISTER.

SIR: I desire to state that the use made by Mr. James Roberts of my poem in your last issue was without my authority or approbation. The poem was written some years ago, and must not be assumed to represent my present view on the subject of which it treats.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

DALE BANNISTER.

The Doctor stared at the letter.

"Bannister—Dale Bannister wrote that!" and he flung the paper angrily on the floor. "Give me my hat."

"You're not going——"

"Yes, I am, Ethel. I'm going to find out what this means."

"Hadn't you better wait till you're less——"

"Less what, Ethel? What do you mean?"

"Till the rain stops, Jim, dear; and it's just baby's time for coming down."

"Hang—no, I beg your pardon, Ethel. I'm very sorry, but I must see the end of this."

He rushed out, and the baby found a dull, preoccupied, almost tearful, very unamusing mother to play with that day.

The Doctor marched into Dale's room with a stern look on his face.

"Well, Roberts, how are you?" asked Dale, not graciously.

"What does this mean, Bannister?"

"It means, my dear fellow, that you took my name in vain, and I had to say so."

"I'm not thinking of myself, though it would have been more friendly to write to me first."

"Well, I was riled, and didn't think of that."

"But do you mean to deny your own words?"

"Really, Roberts, you seem to forget that I don't enjoy setting the place by the ears, although you seem to."

"You wrote that poem?"

"Of course I wrote the damned thing," said Dale peevishly.

"And now—Bannister, you're not going to—to throw us over?"

"Nonsense! I like to publish my views at my own time and place, that's all."

"A man like you belongs to his followers as much as to himself."

"More, it seems."

The Doctor looked at him almost scornfully. Dale did not like scorn from anyone.

"I was particularly anxious," he began apologetically, "not to get into a shindy here. I wanted to drop politics and so on, and be friendly——"

"Do you know what you're saying, or the meanness of it?"

"Meanness? What do you mean?"

"You know very well. All I want to know is if you wrote this thing?"

"Of course I wrote it."

"And you stand to it?"

"Yes. I think you ought to have asked me before you did it."

"The Squire is shocked, eh?" asked the Doctor, with a sneer.

"The Squire's views are nothing to me," answered Dale, flushing very red.

The Doctor laughed bitterly.

"Come, come, old fellow," said Dale, "don't let us quarrel."

"Quarrel? Well, we won't. Only look here, Bannister."

"Well?"

"If you throw us over now, you'll be——"

"There, don't abuse me any more."

"Oh, I wasn't going to abuse you. If you leave us,—you, the leader we trusted,—where are we, where are we?"

"Give me another chance," said Dale, holding out his hand.

"You won't withdraw this?"

"How the deuce can I now?"

The Doctor shook his hand, saying:

"Don't betray us, don't betray us;" and thus the very uncomfortable interview came to a desired end.

That night at dinner Dale was cross and in low spirits. His friends, perceiving it, forbore to express their views as to his last public utterance, and the repast dragged its weary length along amid intermittent conversation.

When the dessert was on the table, a note was brought for Dale. It was from the Squire.

DEAR BANNISTER: I was very glad to see your letter in the *Chronicle*. Mrs. Delane joins me in hoping you will dine with us to-morrow *en famille*. Excuse short notice. The man waits for an answer—don't write one.

Yours truly,

GEORGE DELANE.

"Say I'll come with great pleasure," said Dale, his face growing brighter.

"Where will he go with great pleasure?" asked Philip of Nellie Fane.

"Where is it, Dale?"

"Oh, only to the Grange, to dinner to-morrow. I think I had better write a note, though—don't you think so, Phil? More—more attentive, you know."

"Write, my son," answered Philip, and, as Dale left the room, he looked round with a smile and exclaimed, "One!"

"One what, my dear?" asked Mrs. Hodge.

"Piece of silver, ma'am," replied Philip.

"You're sneering again," said Nellie in a warning tone. "Why shouldn't he like to dine at the Grange?" and she looked marvelously reasonable and indifferent.

"I was speaking with the voice of Doctor Roberts, Nellie, that's all. For my own part, I think a dinner is one of those things one may accept even from the enemy."

CHAPTER IX.

Dale's Own Opinion.

IF ever our own fortune would allow us to be perfectly happy, the consummation is prevented and spoiled by the obstinately intruding unhappiness of others. The reverend person who was of opinion that the bliss of the blessed would be increased and, so to say, vivified by the sight of the tortures of the damned, finds few supporters nowadays, perhaps because our tenderer feelings shrink from such a ruthless application of the doctrine that only by contemplating the worse can we enjoy the better; perhaps also because we are not so sure as he was that we should not be the onlooked rather than the onlookers if ever his picture came to be realized. So sensitive are we to the ills that others suffer that at times we feel almost a grudge against them for their persistence —however unwilling it be—in marring our perfect contentment; surely they could let us forget them for once in a way.

This last was Dale Bannister's frame of mind as he lay, idly and yet not peacefully, on his sofa next morning. This Doctor, with his unflinching logic and unrestrained zeal, was a

nuisance. His devotion had not been sought, and certainly, if it entailed scenes like yesterday's, was not desired. Dale never asked him to ruin his practice, as Philip Hume said he was doing, in order to uphold Dale's principles; Dale did not want a starving family to his account, whose hungry looks should press him to a close questioning of his conscience. Any man with an ounce of common sense would understand that there was a time for everything, and a place. It was one thing to publish your views in a book, addressed to the world of thinkers and intelligent readers; it was quite another to brandish them in the face of your neighbors, and explode them, like shells, in the innocent streets of Denborough. And yet, because he recognized this obvious distinction, because he had some sense of what was suitable and reasonable, and because he refused to make enemies of people simply because they were well off, the Doctor stormed at him as if he were a traitor and a snob. And Philip Hume had taken to smiling in an aggravating way when the Grange was mentioned; and even Nellie—— But Dale, alert as he was in his present mood to discover matter of complaint, found none against Nellie, unless it might be some falling off in her old cheerfulness and buoyancy.

Dale lit his pipe and set himself to consider with impartiality whether Roberts had in fact any grievance against him. He wanted to satisfy himself that there was no basis for the Doctor's indignation; his self-esteem demanded

that the accusation should be disproved, But really it was too plain. What had he done? Refused to acquiesce in being made a fool of, refused to meet civility with incivility, to play the churl, to shut his eyes to intelligence and culture and attractiveness because they happened to be found among people who did not think as he did or as Roberts was pleased to think. He knew what those sneers meant, but he would go his own way. Things had come to a pretty pass if a man might not be civil and seek to avoid wholly unnecessary causes of offense without being treated as a renegade to all his convictions. That was not his idea of breadth of mind or toleration, or of good feeling either. It was simple bigotry, as narrow as —aye, narrower than—anything he at least had found on the other side.

Dale disposed of this question, but he still lay on the sofa and thought. It had been a gain to him, he said to himself, to see this new side of life; the expedition to Littlehill was well justified. It is good for a man to take a flag of truce and go talk with the enemy in the gate. He may not change his own views,—Dale was conscious of no change in his,—but he comes to see how other people may hold different ones, and the reason, or anyhow the naturalness, of theirs. A man of Roberts' fierce Puritan temper could not feel nor appreciate what appealed to him so strongly in such a life as they lived, for instance, at the Grange. It had a beauty so its own, that unquestioned superiority, not grasped as a prize or valued as an

opportunity, but gravely accepted as the parent of duties—the unbroken family life, grasping through many hands the torch undimmed from reverend antiquity—the very house, which seemed to enshrine honorable traditions, at which he could not bring himself to sneer. The sweetness of it all broke back baffled from the wall of the Doctor's stern conviction and iron determination. Yet how sweet it all was! And these people welcomed into their circle any man who had a claim to welcome, freely, ungrudgingly, cordially. All they asked was a little gentleness to their—he supposed they were prejudices, a little deference to their prepossessions, a little smoothing off of the rougher edges of difference. It was not much to ask. Was he churlishly to deny the small concession, to refuse to meet them any part of the way, to intrench himself in the dogmatic intolerance of his most vehement utterances, to shut his mind off from this new source of inspiration? That was what Roberts wanted. Well, then—Roberts be hanged!

The course of these reflections produced in Dale a return to his usual equanimity. It was plainly impossible to please everybody. He must act as seemed right to himself, neglecting the frowns of unreasonable grumblers. No doubt Roberts was devoted to him, and Arthur Angell too. Yet Roberts abused him, and Arthur bothered him with imploring letters, which warned him against the subtle temptations of his new life. It was a curious sort of devotion which showed itself mainly in criticism

and disapproval; it was very flattering of these good friends to set him on a pedestal and require him to live up to the position; only, unfortunately, the pedestal was of their choosing, not his. All he asked was to be allowed to live a quiet life and work out his own ideas in his own way. If they could not put up with that, why—— Dale refilled his pipe and opened a story by Maupassant.

It may be asserted that every man is the victim of a particular sort of follies, the follies engendered by his particular sort of surroundings; they make a fool's circle within which each of us has a foot planted; for the rest, we may be, and no doubt generally are, very sensible people. If we set aside Squire Delane's special and indigenous illusions, he was very far indeed from a fool, and after dinner that evening he treated his distinguished guest with no small tact. The young man was beyond question a force; was it outside of ingenuity to turn him in a better direction?

"Everybody approves of your letter," he said. "Roberts had no business to drag your name in."

"Of course one is exposed to that sort of thing."

"It's a penalty of greatness. But the case is peculiar when you're actually living in the place."

"That's exactly what I feel. It's making me a party in a local quarrel."

"That's what he wanted to do; he wanted to fight under your shield."

"I didn't come here to fight at all."

"I should think not; and you haven't found us thirsting for battle, have you?"

"I have found a kinder welcome than I had any right to expect."

"My dear fellow! Much as we differ, we're all proud of counting you as a Denshire man. And I don't suppose we shall quarrel much about Denshire affairs. Oh, I know you think the whole system of country life an iniquity. I don't go so deep myself. I say, there it is. Perhaps it might be changed, but, pending that, sensible men can work together to make the best of it. At any rate, they can avoid treading on one another's corns."

"I want to avoid everybody's corns, if they'll avoid mine."

"Well, we'll try. I dare say we shall pull together. At any rate, it's very pleasant dining together. Shall we go upstairs and ask Janet for a song?"

Mrs. Delane had evidently caught her cue from her husband, and she treated Dale not as a sinner who repenteth,—a mode of reception which, after all, requires great tact to make it acceptable,—but as one who had never been a sinner at all. She asked Dale if he had been overwhelmed by callers. He replied that he had not suffered much in that way.

"I knew it," she said. "You have frightened them, Mr. Bannister; they think you came in search of studious retirement."

"Oh, I hate both study and retirement, Mrs. Delane."

"Well, I shall tell people that—may I? Now, when I was at the Cransfords' yesterday,—he's our Lord Lieutenant, you know,—they were wondering whether they might call."

"I am delighted to see anyone."

"From the Mayor upward—or, I suppose, Hedger would think I ought to say downward. We heard what fun you made of the poor man."

"Mr. Bannister will be more respectful to the Lord Lieutenant," said Janet, smiling.

"I suppose I disapprove of Lord Lieutenants," remarked Dale, with a laugh.

"You'll like Lady Cransford very much, and she'll like you. She gives so many balls that a bachelor household is a godsend."

"Bannister hardly depends on that for a welcome, my dear," said the Squire from the hearthrug.

"Now I declare, meeting him just as a friend like this, I'm always forgetting that he's a famous man."

"Please go on, Mrs. Delane. It's a capital exchange. But when are you going to give me the pleasure of seeing you at Littlehill?"

Mrs. Delane paused for just a second.

"I should like to visit your hermit's cell. But I'm so busy just now, and I dare say you are. When your guests forsake you, perhaps we will come and relieve your solitude. Janet, will you give us some music?"

Dale followed Janet to the piano, with a little frown on his brow. Why wouldn't she come now? Was it—— Janet's voice dispersed the frown and the reflection.

She sang a couple of songs, choosing them out of a book. As she turned over the leaves, Dale saw that some of the airs were set to words of his own writing. When Janet came to one of these, she turned the leaf hastily. The Squire had gone out, and Mrs. Delane, with the privilege of near relationship, was absorbed in a novel.

"Will you do me a great favor?" he said.

"What, Mr. Bannister?"

"I should like to hear you sing words of mine. See, here are two or three."

She glanced through them; then she shut the book and made as though to rise.

"You won't do it?"

Janet blushed and looked troubled.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Bannister; but I can't sing those words. I—I don't like them."

"I am sorry they are so bad," he answered in an offended tone.

"Oh, of course, so far as power and—and beauty goes, everything in the book is trash compared to them. But I can't sing them."

"I won't press you."

"I know you are angry. Please don't be angry, Mr. Bannister. I can't do what I think wrong, can I?"

"Oh, I have no right to be angry."

"There, you wouldn't say that unless you were angry. People never do."

"You have such a wretchedly bad opinion of me, Miss Delane."

"Do you mind that?"

"You know I do."

"Then one would think you would try to change it."

"Ah, how can I?"

"Write something I should delight in singing."

"If I do, may I dedicate it to you?"

"I'm afraid that wouldn't be allowed."

"But if it were allowed, would you allow it?"

"You know how proud any girl would be of it—of course you know."

"You don't do justice to my humility."

"Do justice to yourself first, Mr. Bannister."

"What sort of songs do you like?"

"Oh, anything honest, and manly, and patriotic, and—and nice in feeling."

"A catholic taste—and yet none of mine satisfy it."

"I will not be quarreled with," declared Janet.

"My only wish is to propitiate you."

"Then you know now how to do it."

It must be allowed that conversations of this nature have a pleasantness of their own, and Dale left the Grange with a delightful feeling of having been treated as he ought to be treated. He found Philip Hume writing and smoking in the study.

"Well, been stroked the right way, old man?" asked Philip, throwing down his pen.

Dale helped himself to whisky and soda water, without replying.

"I've been having a talk with Nellie," pursued Philip.

"What's wrong with Nellie?"

"She's got some notion in her head that she and her mother ought to go."

Dale was lighting a cigar.

"Of course I told her it was all nonsense, and that you meant them to stay as long as they liked. She's got some maggot in her head about propriety—all nonsense, when her mother's here."

"I don't want them to go, if they like staying," said Dale.

"Well, we should be slow without Nellie, shouldn't we? You must blow her up for thinking of it. She only wants to be persuaded."

"She can do as she likes."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic about it, one way or the other."

"Well, my dear Phil, I can't be expected to cry at the idea of little Nellie Fane leaving us."

"Yet you made rather a point of her coming—but that was two months ago."

"Really, you might leave Nellie and me to settle it."

"What I told her was right, I suppose?"

"Well, you don't suppose I wanted you to tell her to pack up?"

"I don't know what you want, old man," said Philip; "and I doubt if you do."

CHAPTER X.

A Prejudiced Verdict.

IT has been contumeliously said by insolent Englishmen—a part of our population which may sometimes seem to foreign eyes as large as the whole—that you might put any other of the world's capitals, say Paris or New York, down in London, and your cabman would not be able to find it. However this may be,—and there is no need in this place either for assertions or admissions,—it is certain that you might unload a wagonful of talents in Piccadilly, and they would speedily be absorbed and leave little obvious trace of the new ingredient. Hence the advantage, for a man who does not dislike the *digito monstrari et dicier "hic est,"* of dwelling in small places, and hence, a cynic might suggest, the craving for quieter quarters displayed by some of our less conspicuous celebrities. It is better, says a certain authority, to reign in hell than serve in heaven; and a man may grow weary of walking unrecognized down the Strand, when he has only, to be the beheld of all beholders, to take up his residence in—perhaps it will be more prudent to say Market Denborough, and not

point the finger of printed scorn at any better known resort.

This very ungenerous explanation was the one which Miss Victoria Smith chose to adopt as accounting for Dale Bannister's coming to Littlehill. Such an idea had never crossed her mind at first, but it became evident that a man who could leave his friend in the lurch and palter with his principles, as Dale's letter to the *Chronicle* showed him to be doing, could only be credited with any discoverable motive less bad and contemptible than the worst through mere hastiness and ill-considered good nature. For her part, she liked a man to stick to his colors and to his friends, and not be ashamed before the tea tables of Denshire. No, she had never read his poems, she had no time, but papa had, and agreed with every word of them.

"Gad! does he?" said Sir Harry Fulmer, to whom these views were expressed. "Well played the Colonel!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, some of them made me sit up rather," remarked Sir Harry.

"Oh, anything would make you 'sit up,' as you call it. I don't consider you a Radical."

"I voted for your friend the Doctor anyhow."

"Yes, that was good of you. You were the only one with an elementary sense of justice."

Sir Harry's sense of justice, elementary or other, had had very little to do with his vote, but he said with honest pride:

"Somebody ought to stand by a fellow when he's down."

"Especially when he's in the right."

"Well, I don't quite see, Miss Smith, what business it was of Roberts' to cut up the Vicar's sermon. Naturally the Vicar don't like it."

"So he takes his medicine from Dr. Spink!"

"Rather awkward for him to have Roberts about the place."

"Oh, of course you defend him."

"The Vicar's a very good fellow, though he's a Tory."

"You seem to think all Tories good fellows."

"So they are, most of them."

"I suppose you think Mr. Bannister's right too?"

"I shouldn't be so down on him as you are."

"You like people who lead their friends on and then forsake them?"

"Bannister never asked him to write the letter."

"Well, it's not my idea of friendship. I wouldn't have a friend who thought that conduct right."

"Then I think it deuced wrong," said Sir Harry promptly.

"It's no compliment to a woman to treat her like a baby," remarked Tora with dignity.

Sir Harry perceived that it would be to his advantage to change the subject.

"Are you going skating?" he asked. "There's nothing else to do in this beastly frost."

"Does the ice bear?"

"Yes, they're skating on the Grange lake. I

met Hume, Bannister's friend, and he told me Bannister was there."

"Wasn't he going? I rather like him."

"No, he was walking with Miss Fane. I believe I rather put my foot in it by asking her if she wasn't going."

"Why shouldn't you?"

"She said she didn't know Mrs. Delane, and looked confused, don't you know."

"Hasn't Mrs. Delane called?"

"It seems not," said Sir Harry.

"I wonder how long they are going to stay at Littlehill?"

"Forever, apparently. Shall you come to the lake?"

"Perhaps in the afternoon."

Tora returned to the house, still wondering. She was very angry with Dale, and prepared to think no good of him. Was it possible that she and the Colonel had been hasty in stretching out the hand of welcome to Mrs. Hodge and her daughter? For all her independence, Tora liked to have Mrs. Delane's *imprimatur* on the women of her acquaintance. She thought she would have a word with the Colonel, and went to seek him in his study. He was not there, but it chanced that there lay on the table a copy of Dale's first published volume, "The Clarion." Three-quarters of the little book were occupied with verses on matters of a more or less public description—beliefs past and future, revolutions effected and prayed for, and so forth; the leaves bore marks of use, and evidently were often turned by the Colonel.

But bound up with them was a little sheaf of verses of an amatory character: where these began, the Colonel's interest appeared to cease, for the pages were uncut; he had only got as far as the title. It was not so with his daughter. Having an idle hour and some interest in the matters and affairs of love, she took a paper-knife and sat down to read. Poets are, by ancient privilege, *legibus soluti*, and Dale certainly reveled in his freedom. Still, perhaps, the verses were not in reality so very, very atrocious as they unhappily appeared to the young lady who now read them. Tora was accustomed to consider herself almost a revolutionary spirit, and her neighbors, half in earnest, half in joke, encouraged the idea; but her revolutions were to be very strictly confined, and the limits of her free-thought were marked out by most unyielding metes and bounds—bounds that stopped very short at the church door and on the domestic threshold. This frame of mind is too common to excite comment, and it had been intensified in her by the social surroundings against which she was in mock revolt. Dale's freedom knew no trammels, or had known none when he wrote "The Clarion"; nothing was sacred to him except truth, everything as nothing beside reason, reason the handmaid of passion, wherein the spirit and individuality of each man found their rightful expression. This theory, embodied in a poet's fancy and enlivened by a young man's ardor, made fine verses, but verses which startled Tora Smith. She read for half an hour, and then,

flinging the book down and drawing a long breath, exclaimed: "I can believe anything of him now!"

And she had had this man to dinner! And that girl! Who was that girl?

The Colonel came home to luncheon in very good spirits. He had just succeeded, in the interests of freedom, in stirring up a spirit of active revolt in Alderman Johnstone. The Alderman had hitherto, like his father before him, occupied his extensive premises on a weekly tenancy; he had never been threatened with molestation or eviction; but he felt that he existed on sufferance, and the consciousness of his precarious position had been irksome to him. A moment had come when the demand for houses was slack, when two or three were empty, and when the building trade itself was nearly at a standstill. The Colonel had incited Johnstone to seize the opportunity to ask from the Squire a lease, and Johnstone had promised to take nothing less than "seven, fourteen, or twenty-one." If refused, he declared he would surrender the premises and build for himself on some land of the Colonel's just outside the town.

"Delane must grant it," said the Colonel, rubbing his hands, "and then we shall have one house anyhow where our bills can be put up. Bannister will be delighted. By the way, Tora, he wants us to go in to tea to-day, after skating. I suppose you're going to skate?"

"I am going to skate, but I am not going to Mr. Bannister's," said Tora coldly.

"Why not?"

The Colonel was told why not with explicitness and vehemence. He tugged his white whisker in some perplexity: he did not mind much about the poems, though, of course, no excess of scrupulousness could be too great in a girl like Tora; but if she were right about the other affair! That must be looked into.

The Colonel was one of those people who pride themselves on tact and *savoir faire;* he aggravated this fault by believing that tact and candor could be combined in a happy union, and he determined to try the effect of the mixture on Dale Bannister. It would go hard if he did not destroy this mare's nest of Tora's.

All the neighborhood was skating on the Grange lake under a winter sun, whose ruddy rays tinged the naked trees, and drew an answering glitter from the diamond-paned windows of the house. The reeds were motionless, and the graze of skaters on the ice sounded sharp in the still air, and struck the ear through the swishing of birch brooms and the shuffle of sweepers' feet. From time to time a sudden thud and a peal of laughter following told of disaster, or there grated across the lake a chair, carrying one who preferred the conquest of men to the science of equilibrium. Rosy cheeks glowed, nimble feet sped, and lissom figures swayed to and fro as they glided over the shining surface, till even the old and the stout, the cripples and the fox hunters, felt the glow of life tingling in their veins, and the beauty of

the world feeding their spirits with fresh desire. "It is not all of life to live," but, at such a moment, it is the best part of it.

Dale Bannister was enjoying himself; he was a good skater, and it gave him pleasure that, when people turned to look at the famous poet, they should see an athletic youth: only he wished that Janet Delane would give him an opportunity of offering his escort, and not appear so contented with the company of a tall man of military bearing, who had come down to the water with the Grange party. He was told that the newcomer was Captain Ripley, Lord Cransford's eldest son, and he did not escape without witnessing some of the nods and becks which, in the country, where everybody knows everybody, accompany the most incipient stages of a supposed love affair. Feeling, under these circumstances, a little desolate, for Philip was engrossed in figures and would not waste his time talking, he saw with pleasure Tora Smith and Sir Harry coming toward him. He went to meet them, and, at a distance of a few yards from them, slackened his pace and lifted his hat, not doubting of friendly recognition. Sir Harry returned his salute with a cheery "How are you?" but did not stop, for Tora swept on past Dale Bannister, without a glance at him. In surprise, he paused. "She must have seen me," he thought, "but why in the world——" Bent on being sure, he put himself right in her path as she completed the circle and met him again. There was no mistaking her intention; she gave him the cut

direct, as clearly and as resolutely as ever it was given.

Sir Harry had remonstrated in vain. In Tora's uncompromising mind impulse did not wait on counsel, and her peremptory "I have my reasons" refused all information and prevented all persuasion. He felt he had done enough for friendship when he braved her disapproval by declining to follow her example. He did not pretend to understand the ways of women, and Dale Bannister might fight his own battles.

While Dale was yet standing in angry bewilderment,—for who had received him with more cordiality than she who now openly insulted him?—he saw the Colonel hobbling toward him across the slippery expanse. The Colonel fell once, and Dale heard him swear testily at the sweeper who helped him to rise. He thought it kind to meet him halfway; perhaps the Colonel would explain. The Colonel was most ready to do so; in fact, he had come for the very purpose of warning Bannister that some silly idea was afloat, which it only needed a word to scatter.

"Is there?" said Dale. "Possibly that is why Miss Smith failed to see me twice just now?"

"Your poems have shocked her, my boy," said the Colonel, with a knowing look—the look that represented tact and *savoir faire*.

"Is that all? She takes rather severe measures, doesn't she?"

"Well," answered the Colonel, with the smile which brought candor into play, "that isn't quite all."

"What in the world else is there?"

"You know how censorious people are, and how a girl takes alarm at the very idea of anything—you know?"

Dale chafed at these diplomatic approaches.

"If there's anything said against me, pray let me know."

"Oh, it's nothing very definite," said the Colonel uneasily. He did not find what he had to say so simple as it had seemed.

"Indefinite things are most hopeless."

"Yes, yes, quite so. Well, if you really wish it—if you won't be offended. No doubt it's all a mistake."

"What do they say?"

"Well, we're men of the world, Bannister. The fact is, people don't quite understand your—your household."

"My houshold? It consists of myself alone and the servants."

"Of course, my dear fellow, of course! I knew it was so, but I am glad to be able to say so on your own authority."

The aim of speech is, after all, only to convey ideas; the Colonel had managed, however clumsily, to convey his idea. Dale frowned, and pretended to laugh.

"How absurd!" he said. "I should resent it if it were not too absurd."

"I'm sure, Bannister, you'll acquit me of any meddling."

"Oh, yes. I'm sorry my guests have given rise, however innocently, to such talk."

It's most unfortunate. I'm sure nothing more is needed. I hope the ladies are well?"

"Yes, thanks."

"I don't see them here."

"No, they're not here," answered Dale, frowning again.

"I hope we shall see some more of them?"

"You're very kind. I—I don't suppose they —will be staying much longer."

As Dale made his way to the bank to take off his skates, Janet and Tora passed him together. Tora kept her eyes rigidly fixed on the chimneys of the Grange. He made no sign of expecting recognition, but Janet, as she drew near, looked at him, blushing red, and bowed and smiled.

"That girl's a trump," said Dale Bannister. "She sticks to her friends."

CHAPTER XI.

A Fable about Birds.

MRS. HODGE and Nellie, being left to their own resources, had employed the afternoon in paying a visit to Ethel Roberts, and nothing was wanting to fill Dale's cup of vexation to overflowing, unless it were to have Nellie flying open-mouthed at him, as he grumblingly expressed it, with a tale of the distress in the Doctor's household. Ethel Roberts had the fortitude to bear her troubles, the added fortitude to bear them cheerfully, but not the supreme fortitude which refuses to tell a tale of woe to any ear, however sympathetic. She did not volunteer information, but she did allow it to be dragged out of her, and the barriers of her reserve broke down before Mrs. Hodge's homely consolations and Nellie's sorrowful horror. They were reduced, she admitted, in effect to living on little else than her own wretched income; the practice brought in hardly more than it took out, for, while the rich patients failed, the poor remained; the rent was overdue, bills were unpaid, and the butcher, the milkman, and the coal merchant were growing sulky.

"And while," said Mrs. Hodge, "that poor

young creature is pinching, and starving, and crying, the man's thinking of nothing but Nihilists and what not. I'd Nihilist him!"

Dinner was served to Dale with sauce of this sort.

"Can I prevent fools suffering for their folly?" he asked.

"The baby looks so ill," said Nellie, "and Mrs. Roberts is worn to a shadow."

"Did you see Roberts?" asked Philip.

"For a minute," said Nellie, "but he was very cold and disagreeable."

"Thought you were tarred with the same brush as Dale, I suppose?"

"Can't you do anything for 'em, Dale?" asked Mrs. Hodge.

"I can send him a check."

"He'll send it back," remarked Philip.

"I wish he'd get out of the place."

"Yes, he might as well be miserable somewhere else, mightn't he?"

Dale glared at his friend, and relapsed into silence. Nevertheless, in spite of Philip's prediction, he sat down after dinner and wrote to Roberts, saying that he had heard that he was in temporary embarrassment, and urging him to allow Dale to be his banker for the moment; this would, Dale added, be the best way of showing that he bore no malice for Dale's letter. He sent a man with the note, ordering him to wait for an answer.

The answer was not long in coming; the man was back in half an hour, bringing the Doctor's reply:

Three months ago I should have thought it an honor to share my last crust with you, and no shame to ask half of all you had. Now I will not touch a farthing of your money until you come back to us. If your friends pay my wife further visits, I shall be obliged if they will look somewhat less keenly at my household arrangements.

JAMES ROBERTS.

"There is the snub you have brought on me!" exclaimed Dale angrily, flinging the letter to Nellie. "I might have known better than to listen to your stories."

"Dale, Dale, it was every word true. How selfish he is not to think of his wife!"

"Many people are selfish."

"Is anything the matter, Dale?"

"Oh, I'm infernally worried. I never get any peace."

"Hadn't you a good time skating?"

"No. I'm beginning to hate this place."

"Oh, Dale, I've enjoyed my visit so much!"

"Very glad to hear it, I'm sure."

"You must have seen it; we've stayed so long. I've often told mamma we ought to be going."

Dale lit a cigarette.

"Indeed we have had no mercy on you, Dale; but the country and the rest are so delightful."

"Hum—in some ways."

"But I must be back at work. Mamma thought next Saturday would do."

"As soon as that?" said Dale, with polite surprise.

"Think how long we have been here."

"Oh, don't go on Saturday!"

Nellie's face brightened.

"Don't you want us to?" she asked, with an eager little smile. Dale was going to be kind after all.

"No. Why shouldn't you stay till Monday?"

The face fell, the smile disappeared; but she answered, saving her self-respect:

"Saturday is more convenient for—for arriving in town. I think we had better fix Saturday, Dale."

"As you like. Sorry to lose you, Nell."

He sauntered off to the smoking room to join Philip. When Philip came into the drawing room half an hour later in search of a book, he found Nellie sitting before the fire. He took his stand on the hearthrug, and looked steadily down on her.

"Once upon a time," he said, "there was a very beautiful bird who, as it chanced, grew up with a lot of crows. For a long while he liked the crows, and the crows liked him—very much, some of them. Both he and the crows were pleased when the eagles and all the swell birds admired him, and said nice things about him, and wanted to know him—and the crows who liked him most were most pleased. Presently he did come to know the eagles and the other swell birds, and he liked them very much, and he began to get a little tired of the old crows, and by and by he left their company a good deal. He was a polite bird and a kind bird, and never told them that he

didn't want them any more. But they saw he didn't."

There was a little sob from the armchair.

"Whereupon some of them broke their hearts, and others—didn't. The others were wisest, Nellie."

He paused, gazing down at the distressful little heap of crumpled drapery and roughened gleaming hair.

"Much wisest. He was not a bad bird as birds go—but not a bird to break one's heart about, Nellie: what bird is?"

There was another sob. Philip looked despairingly at the ceiling and exclaimed under his breath:

"I wish to God she wouldn't cry!"

He took his book from the mantelpiece where he had laid it and moved toward the door. But he came back again, unable to leave her like that, and walked restlessly about the room, stopping every now and then to stand over her, and wonder what he could do.

Presently he took a feverish little hand in his, and pressed it as it lay limp there.

"The old crows stood by one another, Nellie," he said, and he thought he felt a sudden grip of his hand, coming and timidly in an instant going.

It seemed to comfort her to hold his hand. The sobs ceased, and presently she looked up and said, with a smile:

"I always used to cry at going back to school."

"Going back to work," said Philip, "is one of

the few things in the world really worth crying about."

"Yes, isn't it?" she said, unblushingly availing herself of the shelter of his affected cynicism. She was afraid he might go on talking about crows, a topic which had been all very well, and even a little comforting, when she was hidden among the cushions, but would not do now.

"And London is so horrid in winter," she continued. "Are you going back soon?"

"Oh, I shall wait a little and look after Dale."

"Dale never tells one what is happening."

"I'll keep you posted, in case there's a revolution in Denborough, or anything of that sort."

A step was heard outside. With a sudden bound Nellie reached the piano, sat down, and began to play a lively air. Dale came in, looking suspiciously at the pair.

"I thought you'd gone to bed, Nellie."

"Just going. Mr. Hume and I have been talking."

"About the affairs of the nation," said Philip.

"But I'm off now. Good-night, Dale."

Dale looked closely at her.

"What are your eyes red for? Have you been crying?"

"*Crying*, Dale? What nonsense! I've been roasting them before the fire, that's all; and if they are red, it's not polite to say so, is it, Mr. Hume?"

"Rightly understood, criticism is a compli-

ment, as the reviewers say when they slate you," remarked Philip. "He might not have noticed your eyes at all."

"Inconceivable," said Dale politely, for he was feeling very kindly disposed to this pretty girl, who came when he wanted her, and went when—well, after a reasonably long visit.

"Good-night, Dale. I'm so sorry about—Mr. Roberts, you know."

Dale, having no further use for this grievance, was graciously pleased to let it be forgotten.

"Oh, you couldn't know he'd be such a brute. Good-night, Nellie."

The two men returned to the smoking room. Philip, looking for a piece of paper wherewith to light his pipe, happened to notice a little bundle of proof-sheets lying on the table.

"Ah, the spring bubbling again?" he asked.

Dale nodded.

"My dear fellow, how are the rest of us to get our masterpieces noticed? You are a monopolist."

"It's only a little volume."

"What's it about? May I look?"

"Oh, if you like," answered Dale carelessly; but he kept his eye on his friend.

Philip took up the first sheet, and read the title-page; he smiled, and, turning over, came to the dedication.

"You call it 'Amor Patriæ?'"

"Yes. Do you like the title?"

"Hum! There was no thought of pleasing me when it was christened, I presume. And you dedicate it——"

"Oh, is that there?"

"Yes, that's there—'*To her that shall be named hereafter.*'"

Dale poked the fire before he answered.

"Yes," he said, "that's the dedication."

"So I see. Well, I hope she'll like them. It is an enviable privilege to confer immortality."

"I'll confer it on you, if you like."

"Yes, do. It will be less trouble than getting it for myself."

"Under the title of 'The Snarler.'"

Philip stood on the hearthrug and warmed himself.

"My dear Dale," he said, "I do not snarl. A wise author pleases each section of the public in turn. Hitherto you have pleased me and my kind, and Roberts and his kind, and Arthur Angell and his kind—who are, by the way, not worth pleasing, for they expect presentation copies. Now, in this new work, which is, I understand, your tribute to the nation which has the honor to bear you, you will please——" He paused.

"I always write to please myself," said Dale.

"Yourself," continued Philip, "this mysterious lady, and, I think we may add, the Mayor of Market Denborough."

"Go to the devil!" said the poet.

CHAPTER XII.

A Dedication—and a Desecration.

A FEW weeks later the Mayor stood at his door, one bright morning in January, holding a parley with Alderman Johnstone.

"I dessay, now," said the Mayor, "that you aint been in the way of seein' the Squire lately?"

"I see him last when he signed my lease," answered the Alderman, with a grim smile, "and that's a month come to-morrow."

"I had a conversation with him yesterday, and after touchin' on the matter of that last pavin' contract,—he'd heard o' your son-in-law gettin' it, Johnstone,—he got talkin' about Mr. Bannister."

"Aye? did he?"

"And about his noo book. 'It's a blessin',' he says, 'to see a young man of such promise shakin' himself free of that pestilential trash.' He meant your opinions by that, Johnstone."

"Supposing 'e did, what then? I don't label my opinions to please the customers like as some do their physic."

The Mayor was not in a fighting mood; his

mind was busy with speculations, and he ignored the challenge.

"Queer start Mr. Bannister showin' up at the church bazaar, eh? Spent a heap o' money, too. I met Mr. Hume, and asked him about it, and he said——"

"It wan't no business o' yours, didn't he?"

"Mr. Hume—he's a gentleman, Johnstone," remarked the Mayor in grave rebuke.

"Well, what did 'e say?"

"That where the carcass was, the eagles 'ud be gathered together."

Mr. Johnstone smiled a smile of pity for the Mayor's density.

"Well, what do you suppose he meant?" asked the Mayor in reply to the smile.

"Where the gells is, the lads is," said the Alderman, with a wink, as he passed on his way.

This most natural, reasonable, and charitable explanation of Dale's conduct in identifying himself with the Vicar's pastoral labors had, oddly enough, suggested itself to no one else, unless it might be to Captain Gerard Ripley. His presence had been hailed on the one side, and anathematized on the other, as an outward sign of an inward conversion, and his lavish expenditure had been set down to a repentant spirit rather than a desire to gratify any particular stall-holder. The Vicar had just read "Amor Patriæ," and he remarked to everyone he met that the transition from an appreciation of the national greatness to an adhesion to the national church was but a short step.

Unhappily, in a moment of absence, he chanced to say so to Colonel Smith, who was at the bazaar for the purpose of demonstrating his indifferent impartiality toward all religious sects.

"You might as well say," answered the Colonel in scorn, "that because a man stands by the regiment he's bound to be thick with the chaplain."

Captain Ripley alone, with the penetration born of jealousy, attributed Dale's presence simply and solely to the same motive as had produced his own, to wit, a desire to be where Miss Delane was. The Captain was a little sore; he had known Janet from childhood, they had exchanged many children's vows, and when he was sixteen and she thirteen she had accepted a Twelfth Night cake ring from him. The flirtation had always proceeded in its gentle, ambling course, and the Captain had returned on long leave with the idea that it was time to put the natural termination in the way of being reached. Janet disappointed him; she ridiculed his tender references to bygone days, characterizing what had passed as boy-and-girl nonsense, and perseveringly kept their intercourse on a dull level of friendliness. On the other hand, whatever might be the nature of her acquaintance with Dale Bannister, it was at least clear that it was marked by no such uneventful monotony. Sometimes she would hardly speak to him; at others she cared to speak to no one else. The Captain would have profited ill by the opportunities a residence in

garrison towns offers if he had not recognized that these changeful relations were fraught with peril to his hopes.

At the bazaar, for example, he was so much moved by a long conversation between Janet and Dale, which took place over the handing of a cup of tea, that he unburdened himself to his friend Sir Harry Fulmer. Now Sir Harry was in a bad temper; he had his object in attending as the Captain had, and Colonel Smith had just told him that Tora was not coming.

"Who is the fellow?" demanded Captain Ripley.

"Writes poetry."

"I never heard of him."

"I dare say not. It's not much in your line, is it?"

"Well, he's a queer-looking beggar."

"Think so? Now I call him a good-looking chap."

"Why the deuce doesn't he get his hair cut?"

"Don't know. Perhaps Janet Delane likes it long."

"I hate that sort of fellow, Harry."

"He's not a bad chap."

"Does the Squire like him?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. How beastly hot this room is! I shall go."

"I say, Harry, I've only just come back, you know. Is there anything on?"

"Well, if you want to take a hand, I should cut in pretty sharp," said Sir Harry, elbowing his way to the door.

Captain Ripley, impatiently refusing to buy a negro doll which the Vicar's daughter pressed on his favorable notice, leaned against the wall and grimly regarded Dale Bannister.

The latter was just saying:

"Have you looked at the verses at all, Miss Delane?"

"I have read every one, over and over. They are splendid."

"Oh, I'm new to that sort of thing."

"Yes, but it's so—such a joy to me to see you doing what is really worthy of you."

"If there is any credit, it's yours."

"Now why do you say that? It isn't true, and it just spoils it."

"Spoils it?" said Dale, who thought girls liked compliments.

"Yes. If you had really only done it to please—an individual, it would be worth nothing. You couldn't help doing it. I knew you couldn't."

"At any rate, you must accept the responsibility of having put it into my head."

"Not even that, Mr. Bannister."

"Oh, but that's the meaning of the dedication."

No one is quite free from guile. Janet answered:

"The dedication is rather mysterious, Mr. Bannister."

"I meant it to be so to all the world."

"Oh, did you?"

"Except you."

Janet blushed and smiled.

"I wonder," pursued Dale, "if I shall ever be allowed to name that lady?"

"That will depend on whether she wishes it."

"Of course. Do you think she will—hereafter?"

"Won't you have another cup? It's only half a crown."

"Yes, two more, please. Do you think she will?"

"How thirsty you seem to be!"

"Will she?"

"Now, Mr. Bannister, I mustn't neglect all my customers. See, Mrs. Gilkison is selling nothing."

"But will she?"

"Certainly not—unless you go and buy something from Mrs. Gilkison."

Now whether Janet were really concerned for Mrs. Gilkison, or whether she had caught sight of Captain Ripley's lowering countenance, or whether she merely desired to avoid pledging herself to Dale, it is immaterial, and also impossible to say. Dale felt himself dismissed, with the consolation of perceiving that his dedication had not been unfavorably received in the quarter to which it was addressed.

Accordingly it was in a cheerful frame of mind that he set out for home, scattering most of his purchases among the children before he went.

He was in a kindly mood, and when he saw James Roberts coming up High Street, he did not, as he had once or twice lately, cross the

road to avoid meeting him, but held on his path, determined to offer a friendly greeting.

When the Doctor came up, he stopped and took from his breast pocket the little green volume which contained Dale's latest poems. He held it up before the author's eyes.

"Ah, Roberts, I see you have the new work. How do you like it?"

He tried to speak easily, but the Doctor did not appear to be in a conciliatory temper.

"Are these things really yours?" he asked.

"Of course they are."

"This wretched jingo doggerel yours?"

Dale felt this unjust. The verses might not express the Doctor's views, but an immortal poet's works are not lightly to be called doggerel.

"What a narrow-minded beggar you are!" he exclaimed.

The Doctor answered nothing. Buttoning up his threadbare coat, so as to leave his arms free, with an effort he tore the leaves from their cover, rent them across, flung them on the road, and trod them into the mud. Then, without a word, he passed on his way, while Dale stood and stared at the dishonored wreck.

"He's mad—stark mad!" he declared at last. "How ill the poor chap looks, too!"

The Doctor hurried down the street, with a strange malicious smile on his face. Every now and then his hand sought his breast pocket again, and hugged a check for a hundred pounds which lay there. It was his last money in the world; when that was gone, his banking

account was exhausted, and nothing remained but his wife's pittance—and nothing more was coming. Yet he had devoted that sum to a purpose, and now he stopped at Alderman Johnstone's door, and asked for the master of the house, still grimly smiling at the thought of what he was preparing for Dale Bannister, if only Johnstone would help him. Johnstone had a lease now, he was independent—if only he would help him!

The Alderman listened to the plan.

"It's a new trade for me," said he, with a grin.

"I find the stock—I have it ready. And——" He held up the check.

The Alderman's eyes glistened.

"They can't touch me," he said, "and I should like to 'ave a shy at the Squire. 'Ere's my 'and upon it."

A day or two afterward Dale heard that the sale of "Sluggards" was increasing by leaps and bounds. A single house had taken five hundred copies. "Amor Patriæ" had evidently given a fresh impetus to the earlier work, in spite of the remarkable difference of tone which existed between them.

"It shows," said Dale complacently to Philip Hume, "that most people are not such intolerant idiots as that fellow Roberts."

But what it really did show will appear in due season. Dale did not know; nor did Philip, for he said, with a fine sneer:

"It shows that immorality doesn't matter if it's combined with sound political principles, old man."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Responsibilities of Genius.

DR. SPINK sat in his comfortable dining room with his after-dinner glass of wine before him. The snow was falling and the rain beating against the windows, but the Doctor had finished his work, and feared only that some sudden call would compel him to face the fury of the weather again. A few months back he would have greeted any summons, however unreasonable the hour, and thought a new patient well bought at the price of a spoiled evening. But of late the world had smiled upon him, the hill which had looked so steep was proving easy to climb, and he was already considering whether he should not take a partner, to relieve him of the more irksome parts of his duty. He pulled his neatly trimmed whisker and caressed his smooth-shaven chin, as he reflected how the folly of that mad fellow, Roberts, had turned to his advantage. No man could say that he had deviated an inch from professional propriety, or pressed his advantage the least unfairly. He had merely persevered on the lines he laid down for himself on his first arrival. The success, which

astonished even himself, had come to him, partly no doubt, because merit must make its way, but mainly because his rival had willfully flung away his chances, preferring—and to Dr. Spink it seemed a preference almost insane—to speak his mind, whatever it might be, rather than, like a wise man, hold his tongue and fill his pockets.

So Roberts had willed, and hence the Vicarage, the Grange, and many other houses now knew his footstep no more, and Spink filled his place. As he pondered on this, Dr. Spink spared a pang of pity for his beaten competitor, wondering what in the world the man meant to live upon.

The door bell rang. He heard it with a sigh —the half-pleased, half-weary, resigned sigh that a man utters when fortune gives him no rest in getting gain. A moment later he was on his way to the surgery to see a lady who would not send in her name or business.

He recognized Ethel Roberts with surprise, when she raised her veil. They had known one another to bow to, but he could not imagine what brought her to his surgery.

"Mrs. Roberts! Is there anything——"

"Oh, Dr. Spink, you must forgive me for coming. I am in great trouble, and I thought you might help me."

"Pray sit down. Is anyone ill—your little boy?"

"No, he's not ill. It's—it's about my husband."

"I hope Mr. Roberts is not ill?"

"I don't know," she said nervously. "That's what I want to ask you. Have you seen him lately?"

"No, not very; I passed him in the street the other day."

"He's gone to London, suddenly, I don't know why. Oh, he's been so strange lately!"

"I thought he looked worried. Tell me about it," said Dr. Spink, moved now with genuine pity for the pale haggard face before him.

"Ever since—but you mustn't tell I came to you—or spoke to anybody, I mean—will you?"

He reassured her, and she continued:

"Ever since his quarrel with Mr. Bannister—you know about it?—there is something the matter with him. He is moody, and absent-minded, and—and hasty, and he settles to nothing. And now he is gone off like this."

"Come, Mrs. Roberts, you must compose yourself. I suppose he has let these politics worry him."

"He seems to care nothing for—for his home or the baby, you know; he does nothing but read, or wander up and down the room."

"It sounds as if he wanted a rest and a change. You say he has gone away?"

"Yes; but on business, I think."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you much, unless he calls me in and lets me have a look at him."

"He'll never do that!" she exclaimed, before she could stop herself.

Dr. Spink took no notice of her outburst.

"If he comes back no better, send me a line, Mrs. Roberts, and we'll see. And mind you let me know if you or the baby want any advice."

"You're very kind, Dr. Spink. I—I'm sorry James is so——"

"Oh, that's a symptom. If he gets right, he won't be like that. Your jacket's too thin for such a night. Let me send you home in the brougham."

Ethel refused the offer, and started on her return, leaving Dr. Spink shaking a thoughtful head in the surgery doorway.

"It really looks," he said, "as if he was a bit queer. But what can I do? Poor little woman!"

And, not being able to do anything, he went back and finished his glass of port. Then, for his dinner had been postponed till late by business, and it was half-past ten, he went to bed.

Ethel beat her way down the High Street against the wind and snow, shutting her eyes in face of the blinding shower, and pushing on with all her speed to rejoin her baby, whom she had left alone. When, wet and weary, she reached her door, to her surprise she saw a man waiting there. For a moment she joyously thought it was her husband, but as the man came forward to meet her, she recognized Philip Hume.

"Out on such a night, Mrs. Roberts!"

She murmured an excuse, and he went on:

"Is the Doctor in? I came to look him up."

"No, he's away in London, Mr. Hume."

"In London? What for?"

"I don't know."

"May I come in for a moment?" asked Philip, who had been looking at her closely.

"If you like," she answered in some surprise. "I'm afraid there's no fire."

Philip had followed her in and seen the grate in the sitting room with no fire lighted.

"No fire?" he exclaimed.

"There is one in my room where baby is," she explained.

"There ought to be one here too," said he. "You're looking ill."

"Oh, I'm not ill, Mr. Hume—I'm not indeed."

Philip had come on an errand. There are uses even in gossips, and he had had a talk with his friend the Mayor that day.

"Where are the coals?" he asked.

"There are some in the scuttle," she said.

He looked and found a few small pieces. The fire was laid with a few more. Philip lit them and threw on all the rest. Then he went to the door, and shouted:

"Wilson!"

The small shrewd-faced man who waited on Dale Bannister appeared. He was pushing a wheelbarrow before him.

"Wheel it into the passage," said Philip; "and then go. And, mind, not a word!"

Wilson looked insulted.

"I don't talk, sir," said he.

Philip returned to the room.

"Mrs. Roberts," he said, "listen to me. I am

a friend of your husband's. Will you let me help you?"

"Indeed, I need no help."

"I know you are frozen," he went on; "and—where is the servant?"

"She has left. I—I haven't got another yet," she faltered.

"In the passage," Philip went on, "there is a wheelbarrow. It holds coals, food, and drink. It's for you."

She started up.

"I can't—indeed I can't! Jim wouldn't like it."

"Jim be hanged! I'll settle with him. You're to take them. Do you hear?"

She did not answer. He walked up to her and put a little canvas bag in her hands.

"There's money. No, take it. I shall keep an account."

"I really don't need it."

"You do—you know you do. How much money has he left you?"

She laid her hand on his arm.

"He's not himself, he isn't indeed, Mr. Hume, or he wouldn't——"

"No, of course he isn't. So I do what he would, if he were himself. You were going to starve."

"He will be angry."

"Then don't tell him. He'll never notice. Now, will he?"

"He notices nothing now," she said.

"And you'll take them? Come, think of what's-his-name—the baby, you know."

"You're too kind to me."

"Nonsense! Of course we look after you, Mrs. Roberts."

"Mr. Hume, do you think—what do you think is the matter with Jim?"

"Oh, I think he's an old fool, Mrs. Roberts, and you may tell him so from me. No, no, he'll be all right in a week or two. Meanwhile, we're going to make you and Tommy—oh, Johnny, is it?—comfortable."

He did not leave her till she had consented to accept all he offered; then he went back to Littlehill.

"I think, Dale," he said, "Roberts must be mad. He left his wife and child starving."

"Did she take the things?"

"Yes; I made her."

"That's all right. What a strange beggar he is! He can't be quite right in his head."

"Fancy that poor little woman left like that!"

"Horrible!" said Dale, with a shudder. "At any rate we can prevent that. I'm so glad you thought of it."

"Old Hedger told me they had ordered nothing for three days."

"How the deuce does Hedger know everything?"

"It's lucky he knew this, isn't it?"

"By Jove, it is! Because, you know, Phil, I feel a kind of responsibility."

"Nonsense, Dale! Not really?"

"Oh, you needn't laugh. Of course I couldn't know the man was a sort of lunatic. One doesn't write for lunatics."

"Perhaps they ought to be considered, being so numerous."

"However, it's all right now. Awfully obliged to you, Phil."

"I wonder if he'll come back."

"Roberts? Why shouldn't he?"

"I don't know, but he's quite capable of just cutting the whole concern."

"I think he's capable of anything."

"Except appreciating 'Amor Patriæ,' eh?"

Dale, having got the Roberts family off his mind, drifted to another topic.

"I say, Phil, old chap, will you stop playing the fool for once, and give me your advice?"

"What about?" asked Philip, throwing himself into an armchair.

"What," said Dale gravely, filling his pipe, "do you think about getting married?"

"Are you thinking of it?"

"Discuss marriage in the abstract."

"It is a position of greater responsibility and less freedom."

"Yes, I know that. But a lot depends on the girl, doesn't it?"

"I expect so."

"I say, Phil, what do you think of Ripley?"

"He seemed a decent enough fellow."

"Do you think—I mean, do you call him an attractive fellow?"

"Oh, uncommonly!"

"Really?"

"Well, why not?"

Dale fidgeted in his chair, and relit the pipe, which had gone out. He was much too per-

turbed to give to the filling of it the attention that operation needs.

"I suppose he'll be rich, and a swell, and all that," he went on.

"No doubt—but not a Victorian poet."

"Don't be a fool!"

"I meant it kindly. Some girls like poets."

"They were awfully kind about 'Amor Patriæ' at the Grange to-night."

"Oh, you've been there?"

"You know I have. Ripley was there. I don't think I care much about him, Phil."

"Don't you? Does he like you?"

Dale laughed as he rose to go to bed.

"Not much, I think," said he.

Philip also, being left companionless, got up and knocked out his pipe. Then he stood looking into the dying embers for a minute or two, and thinking, as he warmed his hands with the last of the heat. "Poor little Nellie!" he said. After a pause, he said it again; and once again after that. But then, as saying it was no use at all, he sighed and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Delane Likes the Idea.

ON a bright morning, when February was in one of its brief moods of kindliness, Janet Delane was in the garden, and flitting from it into the hothouses in search of flowers. It was half-past eleven, and Captain Ripley had kept her gossiping long after breakfast; that was the worst of idle men staying in a house. So she hastened to and fro in a great parade of business-like activity, and, as she went, she would sing blithely and stop and smile to herself, and break into singing again, and call merrily to her dog, a rotund, slate-colored bundle of hair that waddled after her, and answered, if he were given time to get within earshot, to the name of Mop. Mop was more sedate than his mistress: she only pretended to be on business bent, while he had been dragged out to take a serious constitutional on account of his growing corpulence, and it made him sulky to be called here and beckoned there, and told there were rats, and cats, and what not—whereas in truth there was no such thing. But Janet did not mind his sulkiness; she smiled, and sang, and smiled, for she was thinking—but is nothing to be sacred from a

prying race? It is no concern of anyone's what she was thinking, and no doubt she did not desire it to be known, or she would have told Captain Ripley in the course of that long gossip.

The Captain stood gazing at her out of the window, with his hands in his pockets and a doleful look of bewilderment on his face. He stared out into the garden, but he was listening to Mrs. Delane, and wondering uneasily if he were really such a dolt as his hostess seemed to consider.

"You know, Gerard," said Mrs. Delane in her usual tone of suave sovereignty, "that I am anxious to help you all I can. I have always looked forward to it as an event which would give us all pleasure, and I know my husband agrees with me. But really we can't do anything if you don't help yourself."

The Captain gnawed his mustache and thrust his hands deeper into his pockets.

"I can't make her out," said he. "I can't get any farther with her."

"It's not the way to 'get farther,'" answered Mrs. Delane, marking the quotation by a delicate emphasis, "with any girl to stand on the other side of the room and scowl whenever she talks to another man."

"You mean Bannister?"

"I mean anybody. I don't care whether it's Mr. Bannister or not. And it's just as useless to pull a long face and look tragic whenever she makes fun of you."

"She didn't use to be like that last time I was home."

"My dear boy, what has that got to do with it? She was a child then."

"She's always blowing me up. This morning she asked me why I didn't go to India instead of wasting my time doing nothing in London."

This was certainly unfeeling conduct on Janet's part. Mrs. Delane sighed.

"I don't know that I quite understand her either, Gerard. There's the Squire calling you. He's ready to ride, I expect."

When Janet came, she found her mother alone.

"Where's Gerard?" she asked.

"He's gone for a ride."

"Is he staying to-night?"

"Yes; two or three days, I think."

"Well, dear, I am glad we amuse him. There doesn't seem much for a man to do here, does there?"

"Don't you like him to be here?"

"Oh, I don't mind; only he wastes my time."

"I begin to think he's wasting his own too," remarked Mrs. Delane.

"Oh, he's got nothing else to do with it—or at least he does nothing else with it."

"You know what I mean, Janet, dear."

"I suppose I do, but how can I help it? I do all I can to show him it's no use."

"You used to like him very much."

"Oh, so I do now. But that's quite different."

The world goes very crooked. Mrs. Delane sighed again.

"It would have pleased your father very much."

"I'm so sorry. But I couldn't care for a man of that sort."

"What's the matter with the man, my dear?"

"That's just it, mamma. Nothing—nothing bad—and nothing good. Gerard is like heaps of men I know."

"I think you underrate him. His father was just the same, and he was very distinguished in the House."

Janet's gesture betrayed but slight veneration for the High Court of Parliament, as she answered: "They always say that about dull people."

"Well, if it's no use, the sooner the poor boy knows it the better."

"I can't tell him till he asks me, can I, dear? Though I'm sure he might see it for himself."

Mrs. Delane, when she made up her mind to sound her daughter's inclinations, had expected to find doubt, indecision, perhaps even an absence of any positive inclination toward Captain Ripley. She had not been prepared for Janet's unquestioning assumption that the thing was not within the range of consideration. A marriage so excellent from a material point of view, with one who enjoyed all the advantages old intimacy and liking could give, seemed to claim more than the unhesitating dismissal with which Janet relegated it to the limbo of

impossibility, with never a thought for all the prospects it held out, and never a sigh for the wealth and rank it promised. Of course the Delanes needed no alliances to establish their position; still, as the Squire had no son, it would have been pleasant if his daughter had chosen a husband from the leading family in the county. The more Mrs. Delane thought, the more convinced she became that there must be a reason; and if there were, it could be looked for only in one direction. She wondered whether the Squire's *penchant* for his gifted young neighbor was strong enough to make him welcome him as a son-in-law. Frankly, her own was not.

Mr. Delane came in to luncheon, but Captain Ripley sent a message of excuse. He had ridden over to Sir Harry Fulmer's, and would spend the afternoon there. Mrs. Delane's reception of the news conveyed delicately that such conduct was only what might be expected, if one considered how Janet treated the poor fellow, but the Squire was too busy to appreciate the subtleties of his wife's demeanor.

Important events were in the way to happen. Denshire, like many other counties, had recently made up its mind that it behooved it to educate itself, and a building had arisen in Denborough which was to serve as an institute of technical education, a school of agriculture, a center of learning, a home of instructive recreation, a haven for the peripatetic lecturer, and several things besides. Lord Cransford had consented to open this temple of the arts, which was now

near completion, and an inauguration by him would have been suitable and proper. But the Squire had something far better to announce. The Lord Lieutenant was, next month, to be honored by a visit from a Royal Duke, and the Royal Duke had graciously consented to come over and open the Institute. It would be an occasion the like of which Denborough had seldom seen, and Lord Cransford and Mr. Delane might well be pardoned the deputy-providential air with which they went about for the few days next following on the successful completion of this delicate negotiation.

"Now," said the Squire, when he had detailed the Prince's waverings and vacillations, his he-woulds and he-would-nots, and the culmination of his gracious assent, "I have a great idea, and I want you to help me, Jan."

"How can I help?" asked Janet, who was already in a flutter of loyalty.

"When the Duke comes, I want him to have a splendid reception."

"I'm sure he will, my dear," said Mrs. Delane; "at least I hope that we are loyal."

"We want," continued the Squire, "to show him all our resources."

"Well, papa, that won't take him very long. There's the old Mote Hall, and the Roman pavement and—— Oh, but will he come here, papa—to the Grange?"

"I hope he will take luncheon here."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Janet joyfully.

"Goodness!" said Mrs. Delane anxiously.

"But, Jan, I want to show him our poet!"

"Papa! Mr. Bannister?"

"Yes. I want Bannister to write a poem of welcome."

"My dear," remarked Mrs. Delane, "Mr. Bannister doesn't like princes;" and she smiled satirically.

"What do you say, Jan?" asked the Squire, smiling in his turn.

"Oh, yes, do ask him, papa. I wish he would."

"Well, will you ask him to?"

"Really, George, you are the person to suggest it."

"Yes, Mary. But if I fail? Now, Jan?"

"Oh, don't be foolish papa. It's not likely——"

"Never mind. Will you?"

But Janet had, it seemed, finished her meal; at least she had left the room. Mrs. Delane looked vexed. The Squire laughed, for he was a man who enjoyed his little joke.

"Poor Jan!" he said. "It's a shame to chaff her on her conquests."

Mrs. Delane's fears had been confirmed by her daughter's reception of the raillery. She would have answered in the same tone, and accepted the challenge, if the banter had not hit the mark.

"It's a pity," said Mrs. Delane, "to encourage her to think so much about this young Bannister."

"Eh?" said the Squire, looking up from his plate.

"She thinks quite enough about him already, and hears enough, too."

"Well, I suppose he's something out of the common run, in Denshire at all events, and so he interests her."

"She'll have nothing to say to Gerard Ripley."

"What? Has he asked her?"

"No; but I found out from her. He's quite indifferent to her."

"I'm sorry for that, but there's time yet. I don't give up hope."

"Do you think you help your wishes by asking her to use her influence to make Dale Bannister write poems?"

The Squire laid down his napkin and looked at his wife.

"Oh!" he said, after a pause.

"Yes," said Mrs. Delane. "Are you surprised?"

"Yes, I am, rather."

He got up and walked about the room, jangling the money in his pocket.

"We know nothing about young Bannister," he said.

"Except that he's the son of a Dissenting minister and has lived with very queer people."

The Squire frowned; but presently his face cleared. "I dare say we're troubling ourselves quite unnecessarily. I haven't noticed anything."

"I dare say not, George," said Mrs. Delane.

"Come, Mary, you know it's a weakness of yours to find out people's love affairs before they do themselves."

"Very well, George," answered she in a re-

signed tone. "I have told you, and you will act as you think best. Only, if you wouldn't like him for a son-in-law——"

"Well, my dear, you do go ahead."

"Try to put him out of Janet's head, not in it;" and Mrs. Delane swept out of the room.

The Squire went to his study, thinking as he went. He would have liked the Ripley connection. Lord Cransford was an old friend, and the match would have been unimpeachable. Still—— The Squire could not quite analyze his feelings, but he did feel that the idea of Dale Bannister was not altogether unattractive. By birth, of course, he was a nobody, and he had done and said, or at least said he had done, or would like to do,—for the Squire on reflection softened down his condemnation,—wild things; but he was a distinguished man, a man of brains, a force in the country. One must move with the times. Nowadays brains opened every front door, and genius was a passport everywhere. He was not sure that he disliked the idea. Women were such sticklers for old notions. Now, he had never been a—stick-in-the-mud Tory. If Dale went on improving as he was doing, the Squire would think twice before he refused him. But there! very likely it was only Mary's match-making instincts making a mountain out of a molehill.

"I shall keep at Jan about that poem," he ended by saying. "It would be a fine facer for the Radicals."

CHAPTER XV.

How It Seemed to the Doctor.

JAMES ROBERTS made to himself some excuse of business for his sudden expedition to London, but in reality he was moved to go by the desire for sympathy. There are times and moods when a man will do many strange things, if thereby he may gain the comfort of an approving voice. It was not so much his straitened means and impoverished household, with the silent suppressed reproach of his wife's sad face, which made Denborough for the time uninhabitable to the Doctor. The selfishness engendered by his absorption in outside affairs armed him against these; he was more oppressed, and finally overcome and routed to flight, by the universal, unbroken, and unhesitating condemnation and contempt that he met with. The severe banned him as wicked, the charitable dubbed him crazy; even Johnstone, whom he had bought, gave him no sympathy. He could not share his savage sneers, or his bitter mirth, or his passionate indignation, with a man to whom the whole affair was a matter of business or of personal grudge. He felt that he must escape for a time, and seek society in

which he could unbosom himself and speak from his heart without stirring horror or ridicule. Arthur Angell at least, who, in regard to Dale and Dale's views, had always been a better royalist than the King, would share his anger and appreciate his meditated revenge. The lesson he meant to give the backslider was so appropriate and of such grim humor that Arthur must be delighted with it.

On Dale's departure, Arthur Angell had moved into the little flat at the top of the tall building in Chelsea, and there he cultivated the Muses with a devotion which was its own ample reward. Though to be passing rich on forty pounds a year is, with the best will, impossible in London as it is to-day, yet to be passing happy on one hundred and fifty is not beyond the range of youth and enthusiasm, when the future still provides a gorgeous setting and background, wherein the sordid details of the present are merged and lose their prominence, and all trials are but landmarks by which the hopeful grub counts his nearer approach to butterflydom. The little room, the humble chop, the occasional pit, the constant tobacco, the unending talks with fellows like-minded and like-pursed—all these had the beauty of literary tradition, and if not a guarantee, seemed at least a condition of future fame. So Arthur often said to Mrs. Hodge, who lived in the same block, a couple of floors lower down; and Mrs. Hodge heartily agreed as she instanced, in confirmation of the doctrine, how the late Mr. Hodge had once played the King at two pound

ten, *consule Pratt*, and had lived to manage his own theater. This was to compare small things with great, felt Arthur, but the truth is true in whatever sphere it works.

Into his happy life there broke suddenly the tempestuous form of the Denborough Doctor. He arrived with but a pound or two in his pocket with wild ideas of employment on ultra-Radical newspapers; above all, with the full load of his rage against Dale Bannister, the traitor. He strode up and down the little room, tugging his beard and fiercely denouncing the renegade, while Arthur looked at his troubled eyes and knitted brows, and wondered if his mind were not unhinged. Who could talk like that about Dale, if he were sane? Arthur would have chaffed his friend, laughed at him, ridiculed him, perhaps slyly hinted at the illicit charms of rank and wealth, for which the poet's old mistress mourned deserted. But to speak in hate and rancor! And what was he plotting?

But when he heard the plot, his face cleared, and he laughed.

"I think you're hard on Dale," he said; "but, after all, it will be a good joke."

"Johnstone will do it," exclaimed the Doctor, pausing in his stride. "His shop window will be full of them. He'll have sandwich-men all over the place. Bannister won't be able to go out without being met by his own words—the words he denies. I'll cram them down his throat."

Arthur laughed again.

"It will be awkward when he's walking with old Delane."

"Aye, and with that girl who's got hold of him. He shan't forget what he wrote—nor shall a soul in Denborough either. I'll make his treachery plain, if I spend my last farthing."

"When are you going back?"

"In a week. It will all be ready in a week. He'll know who did it. Curse him!"

"My dear Doctor, aren't you a little——"

"Are you like that, too?" burst out Roberts. "Have none of you any sincerity? Is it sham with all of you? You laugh as if it were a joke."

"I can't be angry with old Dale. I expect he'll only laugh himself, you know. It will be good fun."

Roberts looked at him in hopeless wrath. It seemed to him that these men, who wrote the words and proclaimed the truths which had turned his life and reformed his soul, were themselves but playing with what they taught. Were they only actors—or amusing themselves?

"You are as bad as he is," he said angrily, and stalked out of the room.

Arthur, puzzled with his unmanageable guest, went down, as he often did, to his neighbors, and laid the whole case before Mrs. Hodge and Nellie Fane. He found them both in, Nellie having just returned from an afternoon concert where she had been singing.

"I believe the fellow's half mad, you know," said Arthur.

"If he isn't, he ought to be ashamed of himself," said Mrs. Hodge, and she launched on a description of Mrs. Robert's pitiable state.

"Well, I don't think that he's got more than five pounds in the world," responded Arthur. "And he's got no chance of making any money. Nobody dares publish what he wants to write."

"He used to be pleasant at Littlehill," Nellie remarked, "when we were first there."

"Yes, wasn't he? But he's gone quite wild over Dale. Do you know what his next move is?" And Arthur disclosed the Johnstone conspiracy.

"It will be rather sport, won't it?" he asked. "Poor old Dale!"

But no; Miss Fane did not see the "sport." She was indignant; she thought that such a trick was mean, malicious, and odious in the highest degree, and she was surprised that Arthur Angell could be amused at it.

"Women never see a joke," said Arthur huffily.

"Where's the joke in making Dale unhappy and—and absurd? And you call yourself his friend!"

"It's only a joke. Old Dale does deserve a dig, you know."

"And pray, why? You choose your friends, why mayn't he choose his? I dare say you would be glad enough to know that sort of people if you could."

"Oh, come, Nellie! I'm not like that.

Besides, it's not the people; it's what he's written."

"I've read what he's written. It's beautiful. No, I call the whole thing horrid, and just like Dr. Roberts."

"I suppose you think, just like me, too?"

"If you don't write and warn Dale, I shall."

"I say, you mustn't do that. I told you in confidence. Roberts will be furious."

"What do I care for Dr. Roberts' fury? I shall write at once;" and she sat down at the table.

Arthur glanced in despair at Mrs. Hodge, but that discreet lady was entirely hidden in the evening paper.

"Well, I'll never tell you anything again, Nellie," he said.

"You'll never have the chance, unless you behave something like a gentleman," retorted Nellie.

Arthur banged the door as he went out, exclaiming:

"Damn Roberts! What does he want to make a row for?"

Meanwhile, the Doctor, who was angry enough with Arthur Angell to have rejoiced had he known that he had embroiled him in a quarter where Arthur was growing very anxious to stand well, was pacing the streets, nursing his resentment. His head ached, and fragments of what he had read, and half-forgotten conversations, mingling in his whirling brain, fretted and bewildered him. He could think of nothing but his wrongs and his revenge,

returning always to hug himself on his own earnestness, and angrily to sneer at the weakness and treachery of his friends. Whatever it cost him or his, the world should see that there was one man ready to sacrifice himself for truth and right—and punish "that hound Dale Bannister."

As he walked, he bought the special edition of the paper, and, in hastily glancing at it, his eye was caught by the announcement that His Royal Highness the Duke of Mercia was to visit Lord Cransford, and would open the Institute at Market Denborough. The paragraph went on to describe the preparations being made to give the Prince a loyal reception, and ended by saying that it was hoped that the eminent poet, Mr. Dale Bannister, who was resident at Denborough, would consent to write a few lines of welcome to the illustrious visitor. The writer added a word or two of good-natured banter about Mr. Bannister's appearance in a new character, and the well-known effect which the proximity of royalty was apt to have on English republicanism. "Who knows," he concluded, "that Mr. Bannister may not figure as Sir Dale before long?"

The Doctor read the paragraph twice, the flush of anger reddening his pale face. Then he crumpled up the paper and flung it from him, resuming his hasty, restless walk. He could imagine the sickening scene, the rampant adulation, the blatant snobbishness. And, in the midst, a dishonored participator, the man who had been his leader, his liberator, the

apostle of all he loved and lived by. Had the man been a hypocrite from the first? Impossible! No hypocrite could have written those burning lines which leaped to his memory and his lips. Or was he merely a weak fool? That could not be either. It was a barter, a deliberate barter of truth and honor against profit—as sordid a transaction as could be. He wanted a position in society, money, a rich wife, petting from great people—perhaps even, as that scribbler said, a ribbon to stick in his coat or a handle to fasten to his name. How could he? how could he? And the Doctor passed his hand across his hot, throbbing brow in the bewilderment of wrath.

For an hour and more he ranged the streets aimlessly, a prey to his unreasoning fury. For this man's sake he had ruined himself; led on by this man's words, he had defied the world—his world. At all hazards he had joined the daring band. Now he was forsaken, abandoned, flung aside. He and his like had served their turn. On their backs Dale Bannister had mounted. But now he had done with them, and their lot was repudiation and disdain. Roberts could not find words for his scorn and contempt. His head racked him more and more. Connected thought seemed to become impossible; he could do nothing but repeat again and again, "The traitor! The traitor!"

At last he turned home to his humble lodgings. The short hush of very early morning had fallen on the streets; he met no one, and the moon shone placidly down on the solitary

figure of the maddened man, wrestling with his unconquerable rage. He could not stem it; yielding to its impulse, with quivering voice and face working with passion, he stretched his clenched fist to the sky and cried:

"By God, he shall pay for it!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"No More Kings."

AFTER her father's report and the departure of Nellie Fane, Miss Tora Smith had been pleased to reconsider her judgment of Dale Bannister, and to modify it to some extent. The poems and the suspicion, taken in conjunction, each casting a lurid light on the other, had been very bad indeed; but when Tora's mind was disabused of the suspicion, she found it in her heart to pardon the poems. Although she treated Sir Harry Fulmer with scant ceremony, she had no small respect for his opinion, and when he and the Colonel coincided in the decision that Dale need not be ostracized, she did not persist against them. She was led to be more compliant by the fact that she was organizing an important Liberal gathering, and had conceived the ambition of inducing Dale to take part in the proceedings.

"Fancy, if he would write us a song!" she said; "a song which we could sing in chorus. Wouldn't it be splendid?"

"What would the Squire say?" asked Sir Harry.

Tora smiled mischievously.

"Are you," she demanded, "going to stand by and see him captured by the Grange?"

"He ought to be with us, oughtn't he?" said Sir Harry.

"Of course. And if our leader had an ounce of zeal——"

"I'll write to him to-day," said Sir Harry.

"Yes; and mind you persuade him. I shall be so amused to see what Jan Delane says, if he writes us a song."

"He won't do it."

"He won't, if you go in that despairing mood. Now write at once. Write as if you expected it."

The outcome of this conversation, together with the idea which had struck the Squire, was, of course, that Dale received, almost by the same post, an urgent request for a militant Radical ditty, and a delicate, but very flattering, suggestion that it would be most agreeable to His Royal Highness—indeed he had hinted as much in response to Lord Cransford's question—to find the loyalty of Denborough, as it were, crystallized in one of Mr. Bannister's undying productions. For the first time in his life, Dale felt a grudge against the Muses for their endowment. Could not these people let him alone? He did not desire to put himself forward; he only asked to be let alone. It was almost as repugnant to him—at least, he thought it would be—to take part in Lord Cransford's pageant, as it certainly would be to hear the Radicals of Denborough screeching out his verses. He was a man of letters, not a

politician, and he thought both requests very uncalled for. It might be that the Grange folks had some claim on him, but his acquaintance with Sir Harry Fulmer was of the slightest; and what did the man mean by talking of his "well-known views"? He was as bad as the Doctor himself. Presently Philip Hume came in, and Dale disclosed his perplexities.

"I want to please people," he said, "but this is rather strong."

"Write both," suggested Philip.

"That will enrage both of them."

"Then write neither."

"Really, Phil, you might show some interest in the matter."

"I am preoccupied. Have you been in the town to-day, Dale?"

"No."

"Then you haven't seen Johnstone's window?"

"Johnstone's window? What does Johnstone want with a window?"

"Put on your hat and come and see. Yes, come along. It concerns you."

They walked down together in the gathering dusk of the afternoon, and when they came near Johnstone's, they saw his window lighted with a blaze of gas, and a little knot of curious people standing outside. The window was full of Dale's books, and the rows of green volumes were surmounted by a large placard—"Dale Bannister, the poet of Denborough—Works on Sale Here. Ask for 'The Clarion,' 'The Arch Apostates,' 'Blood for Blood'"; and outside, a

file of men carried boards, headed, "The Rights of the People. Read Dale Bannister! No more Kings! No more Priests! Read Dale Bannister!"

A curse broke from Dale. Philip smiled grimly.

"Who's done this?" Dale asked.

Philip pointed to a solitary figure which stood on the opposite side of the road, looking on at the spectacle. It was James Roberts, and he smiled grimly in his turn when he saw the poet and his friend.

"He put Johnstone up to it," said Philip. "Johnstone told me so."

Dale was aflame. He strode quickly across the road to where the Doctor stood, and said to him hotly:

"This is your work, is it?"

The Doctor was jaunty and cool in manner.

"No, your works," he answered, with a foolish, exasperating snigger. "Aren't you pleased to see what notice they are attracting? I was afraid they were being forgotten in Denborough."

"God only knows," said Dale angrily, "why you take pleasure in annoying me; but I have borne enough of your insolence."

"Is it insolent to spread the sale of your books?"

"You will make your jackal take those books down and stop his infernal posters, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."

"Ah!" said Roberts, and his hand stole toward his breast-pocket.

"What do you say?"

"I say that if I can make a wretched snob like you unhappy, it's money well spent, and I'll see you damned before I take the books down."

Dale grasped his walking-cane and took a step forward. The Doctor stood waiting for him, smiling and keeping his hand in his pocket.

"Jim!"

The Doctor turned and saw his wife at his side. Dale fell back, lifting his hat, at the sight of the pale distressed face and clasped hands.

"Do come home, dear!" she said, with an appealing glance.

Philip took Dale's arm.

"Come," he said, "let's reason with Johnstone."

Dale allowed himself to be led away, not knowing that death had stared him in the face; for it was a loaded revolver that Roberts let fall back into the recesses of his pocket when his wife's touch recalled for a moment his saner sense.

The reasoning with Johnstone was not a success. Dale tried threats, abuse, and entreaties, all in vain. At last he condescended to bribery, and offered Johnstone twice the sum, whatever it might be, which he had received. He felt his degradation, but the annoyance was intolerable.

The Alderman's attitude, on receiving this offer, was not without pathos. He lamented in himself an obstinate rectitude, which he declared

had often stood in his way in business affairs. His political convictions, engaged as they were in the matter, he would have sacrificed, if the favor thereby accorded to Mr. Bannister were so great as to be measured by two hundred pounds; but he had passed his word; and he concluded by beseeching Dale not to tempt him above that which he was able.

"Take it away, take it away, sir," he said when Dale held a pocketbook before his longing eyes. "It aint right, sir, it aint indeed—and me a family man."

Dale began to feel the guilt of the Tempter, and fell back on an appeal to the Alderman's better feelings. This line of argument elicited only a smile.

"If I won't do it for two hundred sovereigns, does it stand to reason, sir, as I should do it to obleege?"

Dale left him, after a plain statement of the estimation in which he held him, and went home, yielding, only after a struggle, to Philip's representation that any attempt to bribe the sandwich-men must result in his own greater humiliation and discomfiture.

Angry as Dale was, he determined not to allow this incident to turn him from the course he had marked out for himself. It confirmed his determination to have nothing to do with Sir Harry's Radical song, but it did not make him any the more inclined to appear as a eulogist of royalty. Neutrality in all political matters was his chosen course, and it appeared to him to be incomparably the wisest under all

the circumstances. This view he expressed to the family at the Grange, having walked over for that purpose. He expected to meet with some opposition, but to his surprise the Squire heartily acquiesced.

"After this scandalous business," he said, "you must cut the Radicals altogether. Of course, Harry Fulmer will object to it as much as we do, but he must be responsible for his followers. And I think you're quite right to let us alone, too. Why should you literary men bother with politics?"

Dale was delighted at this opinion, and at Janet's concurrence with it.

"Then I dare say you will be so kind as to express my feelings to Lord Cransford; if he thinks fit, he can let the Duke know them."

The Squire's face expressed surprise, and his daughter's reflected it.

"But, my dear fellow," said Mr. Delane, "what has Cransford's suggestion to do with politics? The throne is above politics."

"Surely, Mr. Bannister," added Janet, "we are all loyal, whatever our politics? I'm sure Sir Harry himself is as loyal as papa."

"Come, Bannister, you press your scruples too far. There are no politics in this."

Dale was staggered, but not convinced.

"I'd rather not put myself forward at all," he said.

The Squire assumed an air of apologetic friendliness.

"I know you'll excuse me, Bannister. I'm twice your age or more, and I—well—I haven't

been so lucky as you in escaping the world of etiquette. But, my dear fellow, when the Duke sends a message—it really comes to that—it's a strongish thing to say you won't do it. Oh, of course, you can if you like—there's no beheading nowadays; but it's not very usual."

"I wish Lord Cransford had never mentioned me to the Duke at all."

"Perhaps it would have been wiser," the Squire conceded candidly, "but Cransford is so proud of anything that brings *kudos* to the county, and he could no more leave you out than he could the Institute itself. Well, we mustn't force you. Think it over, think it over. I must be off. No, don't you go. Stay and have tea with the ladies;" and the Squire, who, as has been previously mentioned, was no fool, left his daughter to entertain his guest.

Janet was working at a piece of embroidery, and she went on working in silence for a minute or two. Then she looked up and said:

"Tora Smith was here this morning. She'll be very disappointed at your refusal to write for her meeting."

"Miss Smith has no claim on me," said Dale stiffly. He had not forgotten Tora's injurious suspicions. "Besides, one doesn't do such things simply for the asking—not even if it's a lady who asks."

"You know, I don't think anybody ought to ask—no, not princes; and I hope you won't do what Lord Cransford wants merely because you're asked."

"Your father says I ought."

"Papa wants you to do it very much."

"And I should like to do what he wants."

"I should like you to do what he wants, but not because he wants it," said Janet.

Dale turned round to her and said abruptly:

"I'll do it, if you want me to."

Now this was flattering, and Janet could not deny that it gave her pleasure; but she clung to her principles.

"I don't want it—in that sense," she answered. "I should be glad if it seemed to you a right thing to do; but I should be sorry if you did it, unless it did."

"You will not let me do it for you?"

"No," she answered, smiling.

"You have no pleasure in obedience?"

"Oh, well, only in willing obedience," said she, with a smile.

"It would be very willing—even eager."

"The motive would not be right. But how absurd! I believe——"

"Well, what?"

"That you mean to do it, and are trying to kill two birds with one stone."

"You don't really think that, Miss Delane?"

"No, of course not. Only you were becoming so serious."

"May I not be serious?"

"It isn't serious to offer to take important steps because it would please a girl."

"Aren't you rather contradicting yourself? You called that becoming serious just now."

"If I am, it is a privilege we all have."

"Girls, you mean? Well, you refuse to help me?"

"Entirely."

"Even to counteract Miss Smith's illicit influence?"

"I shall trust to your own sense of propriety."

Dale walked home, grievously puzzled. A small matter may raise a great issue, and he felt, perhaps without full reason, that he was at the parting of the ways. "No more Kings! No more Priests!" Or "An Ode to H. R. H. the Duke of Mercia on his visit to Denborough"! Dale ruefully admitted that there would be ground for a charge of inconsistency. Some would talk of conversion, some of tergiversation; he could not make up his mind which accusation would be the more odious. There was clearly nothing for it but absolute neutrality; he must refuse both requests. Janet would understand why; of course she would, she must; and even if she did not, what was that to him? The throne above politics!—that must be a mere sophism; there could not be anything in that. No doubt this young Prince was not morally responsible for the evils, but he personified the system, and Dale could not bow the knee before him. If it had been possible—and as he went he began idly to frame words for an ode of welcome. An idea or two, a very happy turn, came into his head; he knew exactly the tone to take, just how far to go, just the mean that reconciles deference to independence. He had the whole thing mapped out before he recalled to himself the thought that he was not going to write at all, and as

he entered his own garden he sighed at the necessary relinquishing of a stately couplet. There was no doubt that work of that class opened a new field, a hitherto virgin soil, to his genius. It was a great pity.

In the garden, to his surprise, he came on Arthur Angell. "What brings you here, Arthur?" he said. "Delighted to see you, though."

Arthur explained that he had run down at Nellie Fane's bidding. Nellie had written her letter of warning about the Doctor's conspiracy, but, having thus relieved her mind, had straightway forgotten all about her letter, and it had lain unposted in her pocket for a week. Then she found it, and sent Authur off in haste to stop the mischief.

"It's awfully kind of Nellie," said Dale; "but I don't suppose it would have been of any use, and anyhow it's too late now."

"Yes, so Phil told me."

"A dirty trick, isn't it?"

"Well, I suppose it's rather rough on you," said Arthur, struggling between principles and friendship, and entirely suppressing his own privity to the said dirty trick.

"You'll stay?"

"I've got no clothes."

"Oh, Wilson will see to that. Come in."

Philip met them at the door.

"I've a message for you, Dale," he said. "The Mayor has been here."

"And what may the Mayor want?"

"The Mayor came as an ambassador. He

bore a resolution from the Town Council, a unanimous resolution (*absente* Johnstone owing to pressure in the bookselling trade), begging you to accede to the Lord Lieutenant's request and write a poem for the Duke."

"Hang the Town Council!" exclaimed Dale. "I wonder why nobody will let me alone!"

Then he remembered that Miss Delane had been almost ostentatious in her determination to let him alone. If he wrote, they could not say that he had written to please her. But he was not going to write. True, it would have been a good revenge on the Doctor, and it would have pleased——

"Shall you do the ode?" asked Philip Hume.

"Certainly not," answered Dale in a resolute tone.

CHAPTER XVII.

Dale Tries His Hand at an Ode.

DALE'S preoccupations with his new friends had thrown on Philip Hume the necessity of seeking society for himself, if he did not wish to spend many solitary evenings at Littlehill. The resources of Denborough were not very great, and his dissipation generally took the form of a quiet dinner, followed by a rubber of whist, at Mount Pleasant. The Colonel and he suited one another, and, even if Philip had been less congenial in temper, the Colonel was often too hard put to it for a fourth player to be nice in scrutinizing the attractions of anyone who could he trusted to answer a call and appreciate the strategy of a long suit. Even with Philip's help the rubber was not a brilliant one; for Tora only played out of filial duty, and Sir Harry came in to join because it was better to be with Tora over a whist-table than not to be with her at all. That he thought so witnessed the intensity of his devotion, for to play whist seemed to Sir Harry to be going out of one's way to seek trouble and perplexity of mind.

On the evening of Arthur Angell's arrival the usual party had dined together and set to work.

Things were not going well. At dinner they had discussed the royal visit, and the Colonel had been disgusted to find that his daughter, unmindful of her, or rather his, principles, was eager to see and, if it might be, to speak with "this young whippersnapper of a Prince." The Colonel could not understand such a state of feeling, but Tora was firm. All the county would be there in new frocks; she had ordered a new frock, of which she expected great things, and she meant to be there in it; it would not do, she added, for the Duke to think that the Radicals had no pretty girls on their side. The Colonel impatiently turned to Sir Harry; but Sir Harry agreed with Tora, and even Philip Hume announced his intention of walking down High Street to see, not the Prince of course, but the people and the humors of the day.

"Really, Colonel," he said, "I cannot miss the Mayor."

"Are we going to have a rubber or not?" asked the Colonel with an air of patient weariness.

They sat down, Sir Harry being his host's partner. Now, Sir Harry was, and felt himself to be, in high favor, owing to his sound views on the question of the day, and he was thinking of anything in the world rather than the fall of the cards. Consequently his play was marked by somewhat more than its ordinary atrociousness, and the Colonel grew redder and redder as every scheme he cherished was nipped in the bud by his partner's blunders. Tora and Philip held all the cards, and their good fortune

covered Tora's deficiency in skill, and made Philip's sound game seem a brilliant one.

At last the Colonel could bear it no longer. He broke up the party, and challenged Philip to a game of piquet.

"At any rate, one hasn't a partner at piquet," he said.

Sir Harry smiled, and followed Tora to the drawing room. With such rewards for bad play, who would play well? He sat down by her and watched her making spills. Presently he began to make spills too. Tora looked at him. Sir Harry made a very bad spill indeed, and held it up with a sigh.

"That's the sort of thing," he said, "I have to light my pipe with at home!"

"As you've been very good to-night," answered Tora, "I'll give you some of mine to take with you. Let me show you how to do them for yourself."

Then ensued trivialities which bear happening better than they do recording—glances and touches and affectations of stupidity on one side and impatience on the other—till love's ushers, their part fulfilled, stand by to let their master speak, and the hidden seriousness, which made the trifles not trifling, leaps to sudden light. Before her lover's eager rush of words, his glorifying of her, his self-depreciation, Tora was defenseless, her raillery was gone, and she murmured nothing but:

"You're *not* stupid—you're *not* dull. Oh, how can you!"

Before he set out for home Philip Hume was

privileged to hear the fortunate issue, and to wonder how much happiness two faces can manage to proclaim. Kindly as the little family party took him into their confidence, he hastened away, knowing that he had no place there. Such joys were not for him, he thought, as he walked slowly from the door, remembering how once he had challenged impossibility, and laid his love at a girl's feet; and she, too, had for a moment forgotten impossibility; and they were very happy—for a moment; then they recollected—or had it recollected for them—that they were victims of civilization. And hence an end. Philip recalled this incident as he walked. He had not thought of it for a long time, but the air of Denborough seemed so full of love and love-making that he spared a sigh or two for himself. Well born and well educated, he wrung from the world, by painful labor, some three or four hundred pounds a year. It was enough if he had not been well born or well educated; but his advantages turned to disabilities, and he saw youth going or gone, and the home and the love which had been so confidently assumed as his lot, that even as a boy he had joked and been joked about them, faded away from his picture of the future, and he was only kept from a sigh of self-pity by reminding himself of the ludicrous commonplaceness of his grievance against fate. He knew men so situated by dozens, and nobody thought them illused. No more they were, he supposed; at least, it seemed nobody's fault, and, in view of sundry other sad things

in the world, not a matter to make a fuss about.

He found Dale in high spirits; for Dale had conceived a benevolent scheme, by which he was to make two of his friends happy—as happy as Tora Smith and Harry Fulmer, the news of whom he heard with the distant interest to which Tora's bygone hostility restricted him. He and Arthur Angell had dined together, smoked together, and drunk whisky and water together, and the floodgates of confidence had been opened; a thing prone to occur under such circumstances, a thing that seems then very natural, and reserves any appearance of strangeness for next morning's cold meditations. Dale had chanted Janet's charms, and Arthur had been emboldened to an antistrophe in praise of Nellie Fane. It was a revelation to Dale—a delightful revelation. It would be ideally suitable, and it was his pleasure that the happy issue should be forwarded by all legitimate means.

"Arthur's going to stay," he said; "and I've written to Nellie to tell her to come down with her mother."

"Ah!"

"Of course, I've said nothing about Arthur. I've put it on the royal visit. She'd like to be here for that anyhow; and when she's here, Arthur must look out for himself."

"Why couldn't he do it in London? They live on the same pair of stairs," objected Philip.

"Oh, London! who the deuce could make

love in London?" asked Dale in narrow-minded ignorance. "People's faces are always dirty in London."

Philip smiled, but this new plan seemed to him a bad one. It was one of Dale's graces to be unconscious of most of his triumphs, and it had evidently never struck him that Nellie's affections would offer any obstacle to the scheme, or cause her fatally to misinterpret what the scheme was.

"I don't see," said Philip, "that she is more likely to be captivated by our young friend here than in London."

"My dear fellow, he's at work there, and so is she. Here they'll have nothing else to do."

While Dale chattered over his great idea, Philip pondered whether to interfere or not. He was certain that Nellie had been fond, not of Arthur Angell, but of Dale himself; he feared she would think her invitation came from Dale's own heart, not in favor to a friend, and he suspected the kindness would end in pain. But, on the other hand, affections change, and there is such a thing as falling back on the good when the better is out of reach; and, finally, there is a sound general principle that where it is doubtful whether to hold one's tongue or not, one's tongue should be held. Philip held his.

He shrugged his shoulders and said:

"If this goes on, a bachelor won't be safe in Denborough. What have you been doing?" and he pointed at some scribbling which lay on the table.

Dale flushed a little.

"Oh, I've just been trying my hand at that little thing they want me to do—you know."

"For the Radical meeting?"

"No, no. For the Duke of Mercia's visit."

"Oh! So you're going to do it?"

Dale assumed a candid yet judicial air.

"If I find I can say anything gracious and becoming, without going back on my principles, Phil, I think I shall. Otherwise not."

"I see, old fellow. Think you will be able?"

"I don't intend to budge an inch from my true position for anybody."

"Don't be too hard on the Duke. He's a young man."

Dale became suspicious that he was being treated with levity; he looked annoyed, and Philip hastened to add:

"My dear boy, write your poem, and never mind what people tell you about your principles. Why shouldn't you write some verses to the young man?"

"That's what I say," replied Dale eagerly. "It doesn't compromise me in the least. I think you're quite right, Phil."

And he sat down again with a radiant expression.

Philip lit his pipe, and drew his chair near the fire, listening idly to the light scratchings of the writing and the heavy scratchings of the erasures.

"You seem to scratch out a lot, Dale," he remarked.

"A thing's no good," said Dale, without turn-

ing round, "till you've scratched it all out twice at least."

"It's a pity, then," said Philip, pulling at his pipe and looking into the fire, "that we aren't allowed to treat life like that."

His words struck a chord in Dale's memory. He started up, and repeated:

> "The moving Finger writes, and having writ
> Moves on, nor all your piety nor wit
> Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

"And yet," said Philip, stretching out a hand to the flickering blaze, "we go on being pious and wise—some of us; and we go on crying—all of us."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Delilah Johnstone.

WHEN it became known to Mr. Delane that the ode of welcome would be forthcoming,—a fact which, without being definitely announced, presently made its way into general knowledge,—he felt that he owed Dale Bannister a good turn. The young man was obviously annoyed and hurt at the aspect of Alderman Johnstone's window, and the Squire could not, moreover, conceal from himself that the parade of the Alderman's sandwich-men on the day of the royal visit would detract from the unanimity of loyalty and contentment with Queen and Constitution which he felt Denborough ought to display. Finally, his wife and his daughter were so strongly of opinion that something must be done that he had no alternative but to try to do something. Intimidation had failed; the Alderman intrenched himself behind his lease; and Colonel Smith's open triumph was hardly needed to show the Squire that in this matter he had been caught napping. Bribery of a direct and pecuniary sort was apparently also of no avail, and the Squire was driven to play his last card at the cost of great violence to his own feelings. A week before the great day he sent for the

Mayor and was closeted with him for half an hour. The Mayor came out from the conference with an important air, and, on his way home, stopped at Alderman Johnstone's door. The poems, placards, and posters were still prominently displayed, and over the way James Roberts, in his well-worn coat, paced up and down on his unwearying patrol. He would wait days rather than miss Dale, in case the poet might chance to pass that way. He had nothing to do, for no one sent for him now; he had no money, and could earn none; therefore his time was his own, and he chose to spend it thus, forgetting his wife and his child, forgetting even to ask how it happened that there was still food and fuel in his house, or to suspect what made him so often see Philip Hume walk past with an inquiring gaze, indifferently concealed, and so often meet Dale's servant, Wilson, carrying baskets up and down the street on his way to and from Littlehill.

The Mayor went in and fell into conversation with Johnstone. He spoke of the glories of the coming day, of his own new gown, and of Mrs. Hedger's; and as he raised his voice in enthusiastic description Mrs. Johnstone stole in from the back parlor and stood within the door. The Alderman affected scorn of the whole affair, and chuckled maliciously when the Mayor referred to Dale Bannister.

"Then," said the Mayor, "after the Institoot's opened, there's a grand luncheon at the Grange, with the Duke, and his Lordship, and the Squire, and all,"

He paused: the Alderman whistled indifferently, and his wife drew a step nearer. The Mayor proceeded, bringing his finest rhetoric into play.

"The Crown," he said, "the County, and the Town will be represented."

"What, are you going, Hedger?" asked the Alderman, with an incredulous laugh.

"The Squire and Mrs. Delane are so good as to make a point of me and Mrs. Hedger attendin' —in state, Johnstone."

"My!" said Mrs. Johnstone, moving a step within the door. "That 'll be a day for Susan."

"His Lordship gives Susan his arm," said the Mayor.

"Aint there any more going from the town?" asked Mrs. Johnstone, while the Alderman ostentatiously occupied himself with one of his posters.

"The Squire," replied the Mayor, "did want another,—there's no room but for two,—but he thinks there's no one of sufficient standin'—not as would go."

"Well, I'm sure!" said Mrs. Johnstone.

"You see, ma'am," pursued the Mayor, "we must consider the lady. The lady must be asked. Now would *you* ask Mrs. Maggs, or Mrs. Jenks, or Mrs. Capper, or any o' that lot, ma'am?"

"Sakes, no!" said Mrs. Johnstone scornfully.

"'There is a lady,' I says to the Squire,' as would do honor to the town, but there—the man's wrong there!'"

Mrs. Johnstone came nearer still, glancing at her husband.

"When I mentioned the party I was thinkin' of," the Mayor went on, "the Squire slapped his thigh, and, says he, 'The very man we want, Hedger,' he says; 'all parties ought to be represented. He's a Liberal—a prominent Liberal; so much the better. Now, won't he come?' 'Well,' says I, 'he's an obstinate man;' and Mrs. Delane says, 'You must try, Mr. Mayor. Say what pleasure it 'ud give me to see him and Mrs. Johnstone——' There, I've let it out!"

A pause followed. The Mayor drew a card from his pocket. It was headed, "To have the honor of meeting H. R. H. the Duke of Mercia." The Mayor laid it on the counter.

"There!" he said. "You must do as you think right, Johnstone. Of course, if you like to go on like this, worryin' the Squire's friends, why, it isn't for you to put your legs under the Squire's ma'ogany. So the Squire says. He says, 'Let him drop that nonsense, and come and be friendly—he may think what he likes.'"

There was another pause.

"There'll have been nothin' like it in my day," said the Mayor. "And only me and Susan from the town!"

"There'll be plenty ready to go," said Johnstone.

"Aye, that they will, but they won't have the askin'. Mrs. Delane says there aint a soul she'll have, except me and Susan, and you and

Mrs. Johnstone. You see, ma'am, it isn't everyone who can sit down with the county."

The heart of Mrs. Johnstone was alight with pride and exultation and longing. She looked at her husband and she looked at the Mayor.

"You and me and the Recorder 'ud drive up in the coach," said the Mayor, with the air of one who regretfully pictures an impossible ideal; "and the ladies—Mrs. Hedger and you, ma'am—was to follow in a carriage and pair with a postilion—his Lordship 'ud send one for ye."

"I'd wear my ruby velvet," murmured Mrs. Johnstone in the voice of soliloquy, "and my gold earrings."

"Well, I must be goin'," said the Mayor. "It's a cryin' shame you won't come, Johnstone. What's that mad feller Roberts to you?"

"A dirty villain as starves his wife!" ejaculated Mrs. Johnstone, with sudden violence.

The Alderman looked up with a start.

"Take a day to think it over," said the Mayor. "Take a day, ma'am;" and he disappeared with a smile on his shrewd, good-tempered face.

There was silence for a moment after he went. The Alderman sat in his chair, glancing at his wife out of the corner of his eye. Mrs. Johnstone gazed fixedly at the shop-window. The Alderman looked at her again: she was, he thought (with much justice), a fine woman; she would look well in the ruby velvet and the gold earrings, and the swells would wonder

where old Johnstone picked up that strapping young woman—for she was his junior by twenty years. The Alderman sighed, and looked down again at his poster.

Presently Mrs. Johnstone stole quietly toward the window, the Alderman covertly watching her. When she reached it, she threw a coquettish glance over her shoulder at her elderly husband: did she not know, as well as he, that she was a fine young woman?

Then she began to take Dale Bannister's books out of their place, piling them behind the counter, and to tear down the bills and placards. The Alderman sat and watched her, till she had finished her task. Then he rose and thundered:

"Put them things back, Sally! Do you 'ear *me?* I aint going to be made a fool of."

Probably Mrs. Johnstone was not so sure. She burst into tears and flung her arms round the Alderman's neck.

"There! what's there to cry about?" said he, drawing her on to his knee.

While the Mayor was still in the shop, James Roberts had gone home to his midday meal. He ate it with good appetite, not knowing who had paid for it, and not noticing his wife's terror lest he should ask her. After the meal he went to his study and read some of Dale's poetry, declaiming it loudly and with fury, while Ethel listened with the horror that had begun to gain on her increasing and increasing as she listened. She was afraid of him now—afraid most for him, but also for the child and her-

self; and she thanked Heaven every time he went out peacefully, and again when he came back unhurt.

It was about four when the Doctor took his hat and walked down the street to resume his patrol. To his amazement, the window was bare, the books gone, the placards and posters all torn down. With an oath he rushed into the shop, and found the Alderman sitting behind a pile of volumes, on the top of which lay an envelope addressed to himself.

"What's the meaning of this?" gasped the Doctor, and as he spoke the glass door which led to the parlor opened a little way.

"It means, Doctor, that I've had enough of it."

"Enough of it?"

"Yes. Mr. Bannister aint done me any 'arm, and I'm not going to fret him any more."

"You scoundrel!" shrieked the maddened man; "you thief! you took my money—you——"

"There's your books, and there in the envelope you'll find your 'undred pound. Take 'em and get out."

"So Bannister has been at you?" sneered Roberts.

"I aint seen 'im."

"Ah!"

He was quiet now, the cold fit was on him. He took no notice of the books, but put the envelope in his pocket and turned to go, saying:

"You think you can stop my revenge, you pitiful fool; you'll see."

Johnstone gave himself a shake.

"I'm well out of that," he said. "I b'lieve he's crazy. Sally, where are you?"

Sally came, and no doubt the Alderman gained the reward of the righteous, in whose house there is peace.

When the Squire received an acceptance of his invitation from Alderman and Mrs. Johnstone, he became more than ever convinced that every Radical was at heart a snob. Perhaps it would have been fair to remember that most of them are husbands. Be that as it may, his scheme had worked. The posters, the books, and the sandwich-men were gone. There was nothing now to remind Denborough that it harbored a revolutionist. What was more important still, there was nothing to remind Dale Bannister of the indiscretions of his past. He might now read his ode, unblushing, in High Street, and no placard would scream in ill-omened reminder: "No more Kings!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A Well-Paid Poem.

AMONG the quieter satisfactions of life must be ranked in a high place the peace of a man who has made up his mind. He is no longer weighing perplexing possibilities, but, having chosen his path, feels that he has done all that can be done, and that this conviction will enable him to bear with patience the outcome of his determination, whatever it may be. Of course he is wrong, and if misfortune comes, his philosophy will go to the wall, but for the moment it seems as if fate cannot harm him, because he has set his course and bidden defiance to it.

Dale had made up his mind to disregard cavilers, not to write the Radical ditty, to write the ode of welcome, and, lastly, to follow whither his inclination led. And, on the top of these comforting resolutions, came the removal of his thorn in the flesh—Johnstone's be-placarded shop window—and the glow of well-rewarded benevolence with which he had witnessed Nellie Fane's ill-concealed delight in her return to Littlehill and Arthur Angell's openly declared pleasure in greeting her. Dale began to think that he had too easily allowed himself to be put

out, and had been false to his poetic temperament by taking trifles hardly. He was jocund as he walked, and nature responded to his mood: the sun shone bright and warm on him, and the spring air was laden with pleasant hints of coming summer. He wondered how and why, a few weeks ago, he had nearly bidden a disgusted farewell to Market Denborough.

Now, when a man sets out in such a mood, being a young man, and a man, as they used to say, of sensibility, next to anything may happen. From his contented meditations on the happy arrangement he had made for his friends, Dale's thoughts traveled on to his own affairs. He was going to the Grange—he was always going to the Grange now, and he seemed always welcome there. Mrs. Delane was kind, the Squire was effusive, and Janet—— Here his thoughts became impossible to record in lowly prose. The goddess had become flesh for him; still stately and almost severe in her maiden reserve to all others, as she had once been to him, now for him she smiled and blushed, and would look, and look away, and look again, and vainly summon her tamed pride to hide what her delight proclaimed. It was sudden. Oh, yes; anything worth having was sudden, thought lucky Dale. Fame had been sudden, wealth had been sudden. Should not love be sudden too?

"If I get a chance——" said Dale to himself, and he smiled and struck at the weeds with his stick, and hummed a tune. Anything might happen.

The Prince was due in three days, and already flags and triumphal arches were beginning to appear. It is to be hoped that the demand for drugs was small, for Mr. Hedger was to be found everywhere but behind his own counter, and Alderman Johnstone, having once taken the plunge, was hardly less active in superintending the preparations. The men who had carried those obnoxious boards were now more worthily earning their bread by driving in posts and nailing up banners, and Dale saw that Denborough was in earnest, and meant to make the reception a notable testimony to its loyalty. He loitered to watch the stir for a little while, for it was early afternoon, and he must not arrive at the Grange too soon. Not even the ode itself, which he carried in his pocket, could excuse an intrusion on the Squire's midday repose. As he stood looking on he was accosted by Dr. Spink.

"I have just been to see Roberts," he said.

"Is he ill?"

"Yes. His wife sent for me. As you may suppose, she would not have done so for nothing."

"What's the matter?"

"I don't like his state at all. He took no notice of me, but lay on his bed, muttering to himself. I think he's a little touched here;" and the doctor put a finger just under the brim of his well-brushed hat.

"Poor chap!" said Dale. "I should like to go and see him."

Spink discouraged any such idea.

"You're the very last person he ought to see. I want him to go away."

"Has he got any money?"

"Yes, I think so. His wife told me he had now."

"And won't he go?"

"He says he must stay till after the 15th"—the 15th was the great day—"and then he will go. That's the only word I could get out of him. I told his wife to let me know at once if there was any change for the worse."

"It's hard on her, poor little woman," said Dale, passing on his way.

He found Tora Smith and Sir Harry at the Grange. Rather to his surprise, Tora greeted him with friendly cordiality, accepting his congratulations very pleasantly. He had expected her to show some resentment at his refusal to write a song for her, but in Tora's mind songs and poets, Liberal meetings, and even royal visits, had been, for the time at least, relegated to a distant background of entire unimportance. Captain Ripley was there also, with the ill-used air that he could not conceal, although he was conscious that it only aggravated his bad fortune. He took his leave a very few minutes after Dale arrived; for what pleasure was there in looking on while everybody purred over Dale, and told him his ode was the most magnificent tribute ever paid to a youthful Prince? Dale, in his heart, thought the same,—so does a man love what he creates,—but he bore his compliments with a graceful outward modesty.

The afternoon was so unseasonably fine—

such was the reason given—that Janet and he found themselves walking in the garden, she talking merrily of their preparations, he watching her fine, clear-cut profile, and, as she turned to him in talk, the gay dancing of her eyes.

"Your doing it," she said, "just makes the whole thing perfect. How can we thank you enough, Mr. Bannister?"

"The Captain did not seem to care about my verses," Dale remarked, with a smile.

Janet blushed a little, and gave him a sudden glance—a glance that was a whole book of confidences, telling what she never could have told in words, what she never would have told at all, did not the eyes sometimes outrun their mandate and speak unbidden of the brain.

Dale smiled again—this time in triumph.

"You like them?" he asked softly, caressing the little words with his musical, lingering tones.

"Oh, yes, yes," she said, looking at him once more for a moment, and then hastily away.

"I'll write you a volume twice as good, if—I may."

"Twice as good?" she echoed, with a laugh. "Now, honestly, don't you think these perfect yourself?"

"They are good—better than any I wrote before"—he paused to watch her face, and went on in a lower voice: "I knew you; but I shall do better the more I know you and the better."

Janet had no light answer ready now. Her heart was beating, and she had much ado not

to bid him end her sweet, unbearable excitement.

They had reached the end of the terrace and passed into the wood that skirted it to the west. Suddenly she made a movement as if to turn and go back.

"No, no," he whispered in her ear; and, as she wavered, he caught her by the arm, and, without words of asking or of doubt, drew her to him and kissed her.

"My beauty, my queen, my love!" he whispered. "You love me, you love me!"

She drew back her head, straightening the white column of her neck, while her hands held his shoulders. "Ah, I would die for you!" she said.

Mrs. Delane was a woman of penetration. Though Janet told her nothing of what had occurred,—for she and Dale agreed to let the matter remain a secret till the impending festivities were over,—yet Mrs. Delane saw something in her daughter's air which made her, that same evening, express to the Squire her doleful conviction that the worst had happened.

"I shall say nothing to Janet," she said, "till she speaks to me. I can trust her absolutely. But I am afraid of it, George. Poor Gerard Ripley!"

"My dear, I'm not going to break my heart about Gerard Ripley. I think more of Jan."

"Well, of course, so do I. And I don't at all like it. He's not—well, not our *sort*, as the young people say."

"Mary, you're talking slang. What's the matter with him? The match will make Jan famous."

"Well, well, I don't like it, but you must have your way."

"It's not my way. It's Jan's way. Is she fond of him?"

"Terribly, I'm afraid, poor child!"

The Squire became a little irritated at this persistently sorrowful point of view.

"Really, my dear, why shouldn't she be fond of him? It's not a bad thing when people are going to marry."

"I wish I'd seen it in time to stop it."

"On the whole, Mary, I'm rather glad you didn't. I like the young fellow."

In this state of things—with the lady eagerly consenting, and a father all but ready to urge her on—well might Captain Ripley ride recklessly home from Dirkham Grange, cursing the ways of women and the folly of men, and promising himself to go to India and there be killed, to the end that his tragic fate might bring a pang to Janet's heart in future days. Well might he discover a sudden recall, and return to his regiment, escaping the Denborough celebrations, and risking offense in exalted quarters. So he went; and nobody at Denborough thought any more about him—not even Janet, for joy swallows up pity, and the best of humanity are allowed, without reproach, to be selfish once or twice in life.

That same night, at dinner at Littlehill, Nellie Fane thought Dale had never been so

bright, so brilliant, or so merry. Under his leadership, the fun and mirth waxed fast and furious, till it carried away her doubts and fears, and Angell's sore wonderings why she looked always at Dale and never at him, and Philip's troubled forebodings of sorrows no friendly hand could avert. Dale's high spirits bore no check and suffered no resistance, and there was a tumult in Littlehill, such as had not been heard since its early indecorous days.

Suddenly, into this scene, followed hastily by Wilson, there broke, hatless and cloakless, Ethel Roberts, her face pale and her eyes wide with fear. Running to Philip Hume, she cried:

"My husband! He has gone, he has gone! We cannot find him. He has gone, and taken the pistol with him. What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

CHAPTER XX.

An Evening's End.

THE next morning, Roberts' friends held an anxious conference. The Doctor, being left alone while his wife went out on household affairs, had, it seemed, risen from bed, dressed himself, and left the house. He had taken a few pounds, part of what Johnstone had returned to him, but no luggage. Nothing was gone except his revolver, which had lain on the mantelpiece, his wife having feared to take it away. In the absence of other explanation, it seemed most probable that he had suddenly determined to return to London, and Dr. Spink thought London the best place to look for him. Accordingly, Philip Hume at once started in pursuit; for all felt, though none of them liked to express the feeling, that Roberts was not in a state in which he could safely be trusted to look after himself. His wife was helpless with grief and bewilderment, and kindly Mrs. Hodge determined to spend the day with her, and return to Littlehill only late in the evening; thus at least proper attention would be secured to the helpless child and its hardly less helpless mother.

Not even these troubles could keep Dale

from the Grange, and after dinner, with an apology to Nellie and Arthur, he announced his intention of strolling over to ask the Squire at what point in the proceedings his ode was to come. Nellie had a letter to write, or said she had, and Arthur Angell offered to bear Dale company part of the way, with a cigar.

The two men set out together, and Arthur did not leave his friend till they were at the Grange drive. Then he sauntered back, humming snatches of song between his puffs of smoke, and rejoicing in the glory of a full moon. He had almost reached the gate of Littlehill, when, to his surprise, he saw, a few yards from him, a figure that seemed familiar. He caught sight of it only for a moment, for the trees then came between; and yet he felt almost sure that the stealthily moving form was that of James Roberts. He stood watching to see him again, but he did not; and, going into the house, he told Nellie what he thought he had seen.

"Dr. Roberts going toward the Grange!" she exclaimed. "You must be mistaken."

"I don't think so. It looked like him."

Nellie was not inclined to think he could be right, but she agreed that Arthur had better go and tell Dr. Spink of his suspicions. Arthur went off on his errand, and she sat by the fire alone.

Abandoning herself to reverie, she idly and sadly reviewed the events of the days since her return. How joyfully she had come! But it had hardly been as good as she hoped. Dale

was very kind, when he was there. But why did he leave her so much—leave her to Arthur Angell? And ah, why did he go so much to the Grange? It was all far pleasanter before he came to Denborough, before he knew these great people—yes, and before this Dr. Roberts was there to worry them. The thought of Roberts carried her mind in a new direction. What a strange man he was! And his poor wife! She could not think why he had become so odd and so unfriendly. Yet it was so. He seemed absolutely to hate Dale; she had seen him look at him so fiercely. Dale had not ruined him; he had ruined himself. He was mad to blame Dale. Ah, wasn't he mad?—She sat up suddenly in her chair. What if Arthur were right? What if it were he? Why was he going to the Grange! Dale was there. What was that they said about a pistol? Ah—if——

Without another thought she rose, and as she was, in her evening dress and thin shoes, she ran out of the house and along the wooded road toward the Grange. A terrible idea was goading her on. He was mad; he hated Dale; he had a revolver with him. Oh, could she be in time? They would wonder at her. What did that matter? Her love, her lord was—or might be—in danger. She pressed on, till she panted and had to pause; then, with breath but half recovered, over rough and smooth ground, knowing no difference, she sped on her way.

Dale's talk with the Squire was not long; but the Squire's daughter came to the door to bid

him good-night, and was easily persuaded to walk a little way down the drive with him. She went farther than she meant, as was natural enough; for she was leaning on his arm, and he was telling her, in that caressing voice of his, that all his life and heart and brain and power were hers, and lavishing sweet words on her.

"I must go back, Dale," she said. "They will wonder what has become of me."

"Not yet."

"Yes, I must."

"Ah, my darling, how soon will it be when we need never part? How soon? I mean how long, till then! Do you love me?"

"You know, Dale."

"What was it you said the other day—was it only yesterday?—that you would die for me?"

"Yes."

"Ah, Jan, my sweetest Jan, that you should say that to me!"

They said no more, but did not part yet. At last he suffered her to tear herself away.

"I shall run back through the shrubbery," she whispered.

"I shall wait."

"Yes, wait. When I get in, I will show you a light from my window. A good-night light, Dale."

She sped away down a side-path, and Dale leaned against a tree, in the moonlight, fixing his lovelorn eyes on the window.

As Janet turned down her path, she rushed, in her rapid flight, against a man who stood there in lurking.

Dale's side was to him, but he was watching Dale, with a sneering smile on his lips. When she saw him, she started back. In a moment he seized her shoulder with one hand, and pressed a pistol to her head.

"If you make a sound, I'll kill you," he hissed. "Don't stir—don't scream."

She was paralyzed with surprise and fright. It was Roberts, and—what did he mean?

He pushed her slowly before him, the revolver still at her head, till they reached the drive. Dale's eyes were set on his mistress' window, and their feet made no noise on the grass-edges of the drive. Roberts gave a low laugh, and whispered in her ear.

"He came to see you, did he? The traitor! Not a sound! Wait till he turns! wait till he turns! I want him to see me. When he turns, I shall shoot him."

At last she understood. The madman meant to kill Dale.

He would kill him, before Dale could defend himself. She must warn him—at any cost, she must warn him. If it cost her——

"Not a sound," hissed Roberts. "A sound and you are dead; your head blown to bits—blown to bits!" And again he laughed, but noiselessly.

It was her life against his. Ah, she must warn him—she must cry out! But the cold barrel pressed against her temple, and the madman's voice hissed in her ear:

"Blown to bits—blown to bits!"

She couldn't die, she couldn't die! not like

that—not blown to bits! Perhaps he would miss; Dale might escape. She couldn't die!

He advanced a little nearer, keeping on the grass-edge and pushing her before him, still whispering to her death and its horrors, if she made a sound. It was too horrible; she could not bear it. Ah! he was measuring the distance. She must cry out! She opened her lips. Quick as thought, he pressed the barrel to her head. She could not, could not do it; and, with a groan, she sank, a senseless heap, on the ground at his feet.

Suddenly a shot rang out, and a woman's cry. Dale started from his reverie, to see a woman a step or two from him; a woman, tottering, swaying, falling forward on her face, as he rushed to support her in his arms.

There was a shout of men's voices, and, following on it, another report, and James Roberts fell beside Janet Delane, his head, as he had said, blown to bits; and two panting men, who had run all the way from Denborough, were raising Janet and looking if she were dead, and then laying her down again and turning to where Nellie Fane lay in lifeless quiet in Dale's arms.

"A minute sooner and we should have been in time," said Arthur Angell to Dr. Spink, as the Doctor pushed Dale aside and knelt over Nellie.

And Dale, relieved, ran at all his speed to where Janet lay and threw himself on his knees beside her.

"My love, open your eyes," he cried.

CHAPTER XXI.

"The Other Girl Did."

ON the afternoon of the morrow, Philip Hume, who, summoned by a telegram from Dr. Spink, had come down to Denborough by the first train he could catch, put on his hat, and, lighting his pipe, took a turn up and down the road that ran by Littlehill. Since his coming he had been in the house, and the house had seemed almost to stifle him. He had a man's feeling of uselessness in the face of a sick room; he could do nothing to help Nellie Fane in her struggle for life; he only hindered the people who could do something. Nor did he succeed much better with those whose ailments were of the mind. Arthur Angell sat in one room, suspecting now that, whether Nellie lived or died, his dearest hopes were dead. Dale, in another room, strode unrestingly to and fro, waiting for Wilson to come back from the messages he kept sending him on, now upstairs to Nellie's door, now down the town to Ethel Roberts', now, and most often, to the Grange; and always Wilson, his forehead wet and his legs weary, came back and said:

"Please, sir, there is no change."

Once Nellie had been conscious, had asked "Is he safe?" and, receiving her answer, had closed her eyes again. Ethel Roberts was in no danger; the shock would pass. Of Janet there came no news, save that she was alone with her mother, and cried to be alone even from her mother. James Roberts, in his frenzy, had indeed wrought havoc, and Philip, as he walked and smoked, vehemently, though silently, cursed the ways of this world.

Presently Mrs. Hodge came out in her bonnet.

"Nellie is well looked after," she said. "I am going down to see how that poor little Roberts is."

Philip did not offer to go with the good woman. He watched her heavy figure hastening down the hill, wondering that she seemed almost happy in her busy services of kindness. He could do nothing but fret, and smoke, and try to keep out of the way.

A smart brougham drove up. It stopped by him, and Tora Smith jumped out.

"How is she?" she cried.

"Spink thinks she will pull through," answered Philip; "but of course she's in great danger still."

"May I go to her?" asked Tora.

"She sees no one," he replied in surprise.

"Oh, I don't mean to see her. I mean to stay and help—to nurse her, you know."

"It is very kind of you: she has her mother and a nurse."

"Oh, won't you let me?"

"It does not rest with me. But why should you?"

"I—I once thought such horrid things of her. And—wasn't it splendid?"

Philip looked kindly at her.

"That will please her," he said, "and her friends."

"Mayn't I help?"

"I tell you what: poor Mrs. Roberts has no one but a hired nurse. Mrs. Hodge has run down for a minute, but of course she can't leave her daughter long."

"You mean I ought to go to her?"

"One can't even be kind in the way one likes best," said Philip.

"Well, I will. But I should have loved to be with Miss Fane. I can't tell you how I feel about her. I think people who think evil things of other people ought to be *beaten*, Mr. Hume."

"Doubtless, but justice flags. You can't expect me to beat you, Miss Smith."

Tora smiled for a minute; then she wiped her eyes again, and asked gravely:

"Are you never serious?"

"Yes; I am serious now. Go to that poor woman; consider doing that in the light of a beating."

"You'll let Miss Fane know I—I——"

"Yes; and Dale. What a terrible facer for our celebrations, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes. Harry has ridden over to see Lord Cransford about it. Mr. Delane wants the thing put off, if possible."

"Can you put off a Prince? But I suppose he'll be only too glad not to be bored with it."

"You know Janet is in a dreadful state? Poor girl! It must have been awful for her. The man had hold of her! Well, I shall go. Good-by. I shall run up here again to-morrow."

The putting off of the Prince, in spite of Philip's doubt of its constitutional possibility, was managed: for the ceremony could hardly take place without Mr. Delane's presence, as he had been the inspiring force of the whole movement which had resulted in the Institute; and Mr. Delane felt it utterly out of the question for him to take any part in such festivities, in view of the dreadful occurrence in his grounds and of his daughter's serious condition. The doctors, indeed, told him that she had stood the shock remarkably well; they would not have been surprised to find her much worse. Her reason was unshaken, and, after the first night anyhow, the horror of the madman's grip and voice had left her. She did not, waking or sleeping, for she slept sometimes, dream that she was again in his hands, face to face with death; and Dr. Spink congratulated the Squire and Mrs. Delane on a good prospect of a total recovery. Yet Mrs. Delane and the Squire were not altogether comforted. For Janet lay from morning to evening on her bed, almost motionless and very quiet, whenever anyone was in the room. She asked once or twice after her fellow-sufferers, but, except for

that, and answering questions, she never spoke but to say:

"I think I could sleep if I were alone."

Then Mrs. Delane would go away, trying to believe the excuse.

There are not many of us who would feel warranted in being very hard on a man who had failed in such a trial as had befallen Janet Delane: in a woman, failure would seem little other than a necessary consequence of her sex. Death, sudden, violent, and horrible, searches the heart too closely for anyone to feel sure that his would be found sound to the core—not risk of death, for that most men will, on good cause and, even more cheerfully, in good company, meet and face. It is certainty that appalls; and it had been certain death that had awaited Janet's first cry. And yet she would not be comforted. She had stopped to think how certain it was; then she failed. The mistake was in stopping to think at all. The other girl —the girl he did not love, but who, surely, loved him with a love that was love indeed—had not stopped to think whether the bullet could or might or must hit her. She had not cared which; it had been enough for her that it might hit the man she loved, unless she stood between to stop it, and she had stood between. How could Janet excuse her cowardice by telling herself of the certainty of death, when, had she not been a coward, she would never have stayed to know whether death were certain or not? If she ever could have deluded herself like that, what the other girl did made it im-

possible. The other girl—so she always thought of Nellie—held up a mirror wherein Janet saw her own littleness. And yet he had loved her, not the other; her life belonged to him, the other's did not; she had proclaimed proudly, but an instant before, that she would die for him, and he had praised her for saying it. He would know now what her protestations were worth. He would be amused to think that it was not Janet Delane—the Janet who was always exhorting him to noble thoughts—who was proud in the pride of her race—not she who had dared death for him; but that other, so far beneath her, whom she had not deigned to think a rival. Ah, but why, why had she not called? Surely God would have given her one moment to be glad in, and that would have been enough.

She sat up in bed, the coverings falling from her, and her black hair streaming over her white night-dress. Clasping her hands over her knees, she looked before her out of the window. She could see the tree where Dale had stood and the spot where she had fallen; she could see the fresh red gravel, put down to hide the stains, and the gardener's rake, flung down where he had used it. He must have gone to tea—gone to talk it all over with his wife and his friends, to wonder why Miss Janet had not called out, why she had left it to the other girl, why she had fainted, while the other had saved him. They would talk of "poor Miss Janet," and call the other a "rare plucked 'un"—she knew their way. Nobody would ever call her that—not her father again, who used to boast

that Janet, like all his house, feared nothing but dishonor, and would make as good a soldier as the son he had longed for in vain. Her mother had come and called her "a brave girl." Why did people think there was any good in lies? She meant it kindly, but it was horrible to hear it. Lies are no use. Let them call her a coward, if they wanted to speak the truth. They all thought that. Dale thought it; Dale, who must be admiring that other girl's gallantry, and wondering why he had not loved her, instead of loving a girl who talked big, and, when danger came, fainted—and stood by to see him die.

Of course he could not go on loving her after this. He would feel, everybody must feel, that he owed his life to the girl who had saved him, and must give it to her. Very likely he would come and pretend to want her still. He would think it right to do that, though it would really be kinder just to let her drop. She would understand. Nobody knew he had spoken to her; perhaps nobody need; it would not seem so bad to people who did not know she had promised to be his wife. Not that it mattered much what people thought. She knew what she was, and—she must let him go, she must let him go. And here, for the first time, she buried her head in her pillow and sobbed.

Mrs. Delane came in.

"Why, Janet dearest, you've nothing over you! You'll catch cold. What's the matter, darling? Are you frightened?"

There it was! Everybody thought she was frightened now.

"There is a message from Mr. Bannister, darling. He wants so much to see you, and the doctor thinks it would do you no harm. Do you think you could dress and see him?"

"He wants to see me?"

"Why, yes, dear. Of course, Jan. I know, my dear."

"To leave her and come and see me?"

"Miss Fane? Oh, she's going on very well. There's no reason he shouldn't come over here. You would like to see him, Jan?"

"Tell him to go away—tell him to go to her—tell him to leave me alone."

"But, Jan, dearest——"

"Oh, mamma, mamma, do leave me alone!"

Mrs. Delane went and told the messenger that Miss Delane might see no one for a day or two; she was still too agitated. Then she sought her husband and told him of their daughter's words.

"She must be a little queer still," said the Squire, with anxiety. "Don't be worried, Mary. She's a strong girl, and she'll soon throw it off."

But she could not throw it off—not that thought which had burned into her breast; and all night, by the light of the moon, she sat and looked at the tree and the fresh gravel, the spot where her honor and her love had called on her, and called in vain.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Fitness of Things.

IF anything could have consoled Market Denborough for the certain postponement and possible loss of the Duke of Mercia's visit, it would have been the cause of these calamities. Its citizens were not more hard-hearted than other people, and they bestowed much sympathy on Nellie Fane, who, out of the competitors, was easily elected the heroine of the incident; but neither were they more impervious to the charms of excitement, of gossip, and of notoriety. The reporters and the artists who had been told off to describe and depict the scene of the royal visit did not abandon their journey, but substituted sketches of the fatal spot, of the Grange, of Littlehill, and of the actors in the tragedy; while interviews with the Mayor, and anybody else who knew, or knew someone who knew about the circumstances, or professed to do either, amply supplied the place which the pageant and the speeches had been destined to fill. And if the occurrence excited such interest in the great London papers, the broadsheets and columns of the local journals were a sight to behold. The circulation of the *Standard* went up by more

than a hundred; while the *Chronicle* announced, it must be admitted to a somewhat skeptical world, that its weekly issue had exhausted three editions, and could no longer be obtained at the booksellers' or the office. The assertion, however, being untested, passed, and everyone allowed that young Mingley's detailed account of poor Roberts' last words to Dale Bannister, before he fired, were perfect in verisimilitude, which, under the regrettable circumstance of Mingley's absence, and of no such words having been uttered, was all that could be expected. Mingley was puffed up, demanded a rise of salary, got it, and married Polly Shipwright, the young lady at the "Delane Arms." So the ill wind blew Mingley good. Yet the editor of the *Chronicle* was not satisfied, and as a further result of Mingley's activity, he inserted an article the following week, in which he referred, with some parade of mystery, to the romantic character of the affair. It was not only in fiction, he remarked, that love had opportunities for displaying itself in heroism, nor, it was to be earnestly hoped, only in the brains of imaginative writers that affection and gratitude found themselves working together toward a joyful consummation. Denborough knew and admired its gifted fellow-townsman, and Denborough had been a witness of the grace and charm of the young lady who had shed such luster on her sex. Accordingly, Denborough waited the result with some confidence. Into this personal side of the matter the *Standard* did not try to follow its rival. Mr. Delane con-

trolled the *Standard*, and he forbade any such attempt, on grounds of careful generality. But the article in the *Chronicle* was quite enough; it expressed what everyone had been thinking, and very soon the whole town was expecting to hear, simultaneously, that Nellie was out of danger, and that she had given her hand to Dale Bannister. The theory was so strongly and unhesitatingly accepted that the two or three who, mainly out of a love of paradox, put their heads on one side and asked how Miss Delane came to be out in the garden with Dale Bannister, were pooh-poohed and told that they merely showed their ignorance of the usages of society; whereupon they went home and grumbled to their wives, but were heard no more in public places.

Dale Bannister flung the *Chronicle* down on the table with a muttered oath, asking the eternally-asked, never-to-be-answered question, why people could not mind their own business—an unjust query in this case, for it is a reporter's business to mind other people's business. He had just come down from his first interview with Nellie. She was mending rapidly, and was now conscious, although any reference to the events of the fatal night was sternly forbidden; he was not even allowed to thank the friend who, happily, had only risked, not lost, her life for him. He had whispered his joy at finding her doing well, and she had pressed his hand in answer; more than that vigilant attendants prevented. Then he had come downstairs, picked up the *Chronicle* in the hall,

read the article, and gone into the smoking room, where he had found Arthur Angell sitting by the fire, his hands deep in his pockets and his shoulders up to his ears, a picture of woe.

"What infernal nonsense!" said Dale, with a vexed laugh. "Do you see how this fellow disposes of us, Arthur?"

"Yes, I saw," said Arthur gloomily.

"I suppose they're bound to say that. The public loves romance."

"I think it's very natural they should say it. Why did she follow you? Why did she risk her life? Why did she ask after you the first moment she was conscious?"

"No one but me was being murdered," suggested Dale, with a rather uneasy smile.

"We left her here. Why did she go out at all? But it's too plain. I saw it before I had been here a day."

"Saw what, man?" asked Dale, passing by Arthur's questionable assertion.

"Why, that Nellie—you know. I don't know what you feel, but I know what she feels. It's rough on me having me down——"

"I never thought of such a thing," said Dale quickly.

"Oh, I suppose not; though how you didn't—— I say, now, before you came to Denborough, didn't you?"

"I—I don't think so. We were great friends."

Arthur shook his head, and Dale poked the little bit of fire in an impatient way.

"How damned crooked things go!" he said.

Arthur rose and said in a decided tone:

"Well, I'm out of it. She saved your life, and she's in love with you. It seems to me your duty's pretty plain. You must drop your other fancy."

"My other fancy?" exclaimed Dale in horror. Lived there a man who could call his love for Janet a "fancy"?

"You'd break her heart," said Arthur, who thought of no one but his lady-love in his unselfish devotion.

It crossed Dale's mind to say that the situation seemed to involve the breaking of one heart at least, if Arthur were right; but he thought he had no right to speak of Janet's feelings, well as he knew them. He threw the poker down with a clang.

"Take care—you'll disturb her."

This annoyed Dale.

"My good fellow," he remarked, "we're not all, except you, entirely indifferent whether she lives or dies. I might throw pokers about all day—and I feel inclined to—without her hearing me in the blue room."

"Oh, I beg pardon," said Arthur, turning to the window and looking out.

He saw a stout man coming up the hill. It was the Mayor of Denborough, and he was evidently making for Littlehill. When he was ushered into the smoking room, he explained that he had come to ask after Miss Fane's progress.

"The town, Mr. Bannister, sir," he said, "is takin' a great interest in the young lady."

"I am glad to say she has, we think, turned the corner," said Dale.

"That's happy news for all—and you first of all, sir."

The Mayor might merely have meant that Dale's feelings would be most acute, as Nellie had received her wound in his service; but there was a disconcerting twinkle in the Mayor's eye.

"Mrs. Roberts," the Mayor continued, "is doin' first rate. After all, it's a riddance for her, sir. Have you any news from the Grange?"

"I hear there is no change in Miss Delane. She still suffers from the shock."

"Poor young lady! I hear the Captain's back at the Warren, sir."

"What?"

"Captain Ripley, sir. Back at home."

"Oh!"

The Mayor was bursting with suppressed gossip on this point also, but the atmosphere was most repressive. He looked round in despair for another opening, and his eye fell on Arthur Angell.

"Seen the *Chronicle*, sir?" he asked. "That Mingley's a sharp young chap. Still I don't 'old—hold with all that talk about people. Did you say you'd seen it, sir?"

"Yes, I've seen it. It's mostly lies."

"He, he!" chuckled the Mayor. "You're right, sir."

A long pause ensued before the Mayor very reluctantly took his hat.

"I hope we shall see Miss Fane about soon, sir?" he said.

"Oh, I hope so. I think so, if nothing goes wrong."

"She must be proud and happy, that young lady, sir. As I said to my daughters, says I: 'Now, girls, which of you is goin' to save your young man's life?' And my wife, Mrs. Hedger, sir, she put in: 'None of you, I'll be bound, if you don't——'"

The anecdote was lost, for Dale interrupted: "Let me see you as far as the gate," and pushed the Mayor's walking-stick into his hand.

Having got rid of the Mayor, Dale did not hasten to return to Arthur Angell. At this moment, exasperated as he was, everything about his friend annoyed him—his devotion, his unselfishness, his readiness to accept defeat himself, his indiscreet zeal on behalf of his mistress. His despair for himself, and his exhortation to Dale, joined in manifesting that he neither possessed himself nor could understand in another what a real passion was. If he did or could, he would never have used that word "fancy." How could people speak of friendship or gratitude, or both together, as if they were, or were in themselves likely to lead to, love? You did not love a woman because you esteemed her. If you loved her, you might esteem her—or you might not; anyhow, you worshiped her. Yet these peddling Denborough

folk were mapping out his course for him. And Arthur Angell croaked about broken hearts.

Suddenly a happy thought struck him, a thought which went far to restore his equanimity. These people, even that excellent Arthur, spoke in ignorance. At the most, they—those who knew anything—supposed that he had a "fancy" for Janet. They had no idea that his love had been offered and accepted, that he was plighted to her by all the bonds of honor and fidelity. This exacting gratitude they harped upon might demand a change of nascent inclinations; it would not require, nor even justify, broken promises, and the flinging back of what a man had asked for and received. Dale's step grew more elastic and his face brighter as he realized that, in reality, on a sane view of the position, duty and pleasure went hand in hand, both pointing to the desired goal, uniting to free him from any such self-sacrifice as Arthur Angell had indicated. If Arthur were right about Nellie's feelings, and if he had been a free man, he might have felt some obligation on him, or at least have chosen, to make the child happy, but as it was——

"I must be just before I'm generous," he said to himself, and added, with a shamefaced laugh, "and I happen to like justice best."

At this moment a servant in the Grange livery rode up, touching his hat, and handed him a note. It was from Janet, though her writing was so tremulous as to be scarcely recognizable. He tore it open and read:

You can never wish to see me again, but come once more. It was not quite as bad as it seemed. J.

In bewilderment he turned to the man.

"Miss Delane sent this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Say I'll come over to the Grange to-morrow morning."

The man rode off, and Dale stood, fingering and staring at his note.

"What does the dear girl mean?" he asked. "What wasn't so bad? Why don't I wish to see her again? Has that ruffian driven her out of her senses?"

When Dr. Spink came that evening, Dale seized the opportunity of sounding him. The Doctor laughed at the idea of any serious mental derangement.

"Miss Delane's very much upset, of course, very much, but her mind is as right as yours or mine."

"She's got no delusions?"

"Oh, dear, no. She's nervous and overstrained, that's all. She'll be all right in a few days."

"Then," said Dale to himself, as the Doctor bustled off, "all I can say is that I don't understand women."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Morbid Scruple.

MRS. DELANE had ceased to struggle against the inevitable, and she hailed her daughter's desire to see Dale Bannister as an encouraging sign of a return to a normal state of mind. Strange as Janet's demeanor had been since that fearful evening, there could not be anything seriously wrong with her when her wishes and impulses ran in so natural a channel. Mrs. Delane received Dale with an approach to enthusiasm, and sent him up to the little boudoir where Janet was with an affectionate haste which in itself almost amounted to a recognition of his position.

"You must be gentle with her, please, Mr. Bannister," she said. "She wanted so much to see for herself that you were really alive that we could not refuse to allow her, but the Doctor is most strict in ordering that she should not be excited."

Dale promised to be careful, and went upstairs without a word about the strange note he had received; that was a matter between Janet and himself.

Janet was sitting, propped up with cushions,

on a low chair, and she waved Dale to a seat near her. When, before sitting down, he came to her and kissed her, she did not repel his caress, but received it silently, again motioning him to the chair. Dale knelt down on the floor beside her.

"How pale you are, poor dear!" he said. "And why do you write me such dreadful things?"

"I wanted," she began in a low voice, "to tell you, Dale, that I did try, that I really did try, to call out. I did not forsake you without trying."

"What do you mean, darling? How have you forsaken me?"

"When he caught hold of me, there was plenty of time to call out. I might have warned you—I might have warned you. I might have done what she did. But I couldn't. I tried, but I couldn't. I was afraid. He said he would blow my head to bits. I was afraid, and I left her to save you."

"My dearest girl," he said, taking her hand, "you did the only thing. If you had cried out, he would have murdered you first and me afterward; all the chambers of the revolver were loaded. I would have died a thousand times sooner than have one of your dear hairs roughened; but, as it was, your death wouldn't have saved me."

She had looked at him for a moment as if with sudden hope, but, as he finished, she shook her head and said:

"I didn't think anything about that. I was

just afraid, and I should have let you be killed."

"My sweet, who ever expected you to condemn yourself to certain death on the chance of saving me? It would be monstrous!"

"She did it," said Janet in low tones.

Dale paused for a minute.

"She was not in his clutches," he said. "He might have missed her."

"Ah, no, no!" she broke out suddenly. "You run down what she did to spare me! That's worst of all."

"Why, Jan, I don't say a word against her; but there was a difference."

"She thought of no difference. She only thought of you. I thought of my own life."

"Thank God if you did, dearest!"

"I'm glad you came. I wanted to tell you I had tried."

"I need nothing to make me love you more, my beauty and delight," he said, pressing her to him.

She looked at him with a sort of amazement, making a faint effort to push him away.

"It was so lucky," he went on, "that I didn't see you, or I should have rushed at him, and he would most likely have killed you. As it was——" He paused, for it seemed impossible to speak of poor Nellie's hurt as a happy outcome.

"Come," he resumed, "let's think no more about it. The wretched man is dead and Nellie Fane is getting better, and we—why, we, Jan, have one another."

With sudden impatience she rose, unlacing his arms from about her.

"Who is she?" she cried. "Who is she? Why should she give her life for you? I loved you, and I was afraid. She wasn't afraid."

Dale thought that he began to understand a little better. Jealousy was a feeling he had read about, and seen, and written about. If Jan were jealous, he could undertake to reassure her.

"She's a very old and good friend of mine," he said, "and it was just like her brave, unselfish way to——"

"What had you done to make her love you so?"

"My sweetest Jan, surely you can't think I——"

"Oh, no, no, no! I don't mean that. I'm not so mean as that."

Dale wondered whether this passionate disclaimer of jealousy did not come in part from self-delusion, though he saw that Janet made it in all genuineness.

"You have made her love you—oh, of course you have! Why did she follow you? why did she come between you and the shot? I loved you, too, Dale. Ah! how I loved—how I thought I loved you! But her love was greater than mine."

"Come, Jan, come; you exaggerate. You must be calm, dearest. Nellie and I are very fond of one another, but——"

"You know she loves you—you know she loves you to death."

"My darling, I don't know anything of the sort. But supposing she did—well, I am very sorry, very deeply grieved if she is unhappy; but I don't love her—or any other woman in the world but you, Jan. If she had saved my life a thousand times, it would make no difference. You, Jan, you are the breath of my life and the pulse of my blood."

He spoke with passion, for he was roused to combat this strange idea that threatened all his joy. As she stood before him, in her fairness and distress, he forgot his searchings of heart, his tenderness for Nellie, everything, except that she, and she alone, was the woman to be his, and neither another nor she herself should prevent it.

Looking at him, she read this, or some of it, in his eyes, for she shrank back from him, and, clasping her hands, moaned:

"Don't, don't! You must go to her—you belong to her. She saved you, not I. You are hers, not mine."

"Jan, this is madness! She is nothing to me; you are all the world."

"You must despise me," she said in a wondering way, "and yet you say that!"

"If I did despise you, still it would be true. But I worship you."

"I must not! I must not! You must go to her. She saved you. Leave me, Dale, and go back. You must not come again."

He burst out in wrath:

"Now, by God, I will not leave you or let you go! Mine you are, and mine you shall

be!" and he seized her by the wrist. She gave a startled cry that recalled him to gentleness.

"Did I frighten you, my beauty? But it is so, and it must be. It is sweet of you to offer—to make much of what she did, and little of yourself. I love you more for it. But we have done with that now. Come to me, Jan."

"I can't! I can't! She would always be between us; I should always see her between us. O Dale, how can you leave her?"

"I have never loved her. I have never promised her," he replied sternly. "It is all a mere delusion. A man's love is not to be turned by folly like this."

She answered nothing, and sank back in her chair again.

"If it's jealousy," he went on, "it is unworthy of you, and an insult to me. And if it's not jealousy, it's mere madness."

"Can't you understand?" she murmured. "How can I take what is hers?"

"I can take what is mine, and I will. You gave yourself to me, and I will not let you go."

Still she said nothing, and he tried gentleness once more.

"Come, Jan, sweetest, you have made your offering—your sweet, Quixotic self-sacrifice—and it is not accepted! Say that's my want of moral altitude, if you like. So be it. I won't sacrifice myself."

"It's for her to take, not for you. I offer it to her, not to you."

"But I don't offer it to her. Would she care for such an offer? She may love me or not—I don't know; but if she does, she will not take my hand without my heart."

"You must love her. If you could love me, how much more must you love her?"

"You are mad!" he answered, almost roughly, "mad to say such a thing! I know you love me, and I will not listen to it. Do you hear? I shall come back and see you again, and I will not listen to this."

She heard his imperious words with no sign but a little shiver.

"There," he went on, "you are still ill. I'll come back."

"No use," she murmured. "I can't, Dale."

"But you will, and you shall!" he cried. "You shall see——"

The door opened, and the nurse came in to forbid his further lingering. With a distant good-by, he left Janet motionless and pale, and, hastening downstairs, went to the Squire's room.

"I have come," he said abruptly, "to ask your sanction to my engagement with your daughter."

The Squire laid down his book.

"I'm not much surprised," he said, smiling. "What does Jan say?"

Dale launched out into a history of the sweet things Janet had said, and of the strange, wild things she said now. The Squire heard of the latter with raised eyebrows.

"Very odd," he commented. "But it seems,

my dear fellow, that, for good reasons or bad, at present she says No."

"She said Yes; she can't say No now," declared Dale. "Do you consent, Mr. Delane?"

"If she does, my dear fellow. But I can't help you in this matter."

"I want no help. She is not in her senses now. I shall make an end of this folly. I will not have it."

He went out as abruptly as he had rushed in, leaving the Squire in some perplexity.

"A man of decision," he commented; "and, altogether, a couple of rather volcanic young people. They must settle it between themselves."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Heroine of the Incident.

AFTER Dale's visit to the Grange a few days elapsed in a quiet that was far from peaceful. Dale had gone to the Grange the next day, and the day after that: the sight of Janet had been denied to him. He was told that his visit had left her very agitated and upset, and the doctor was peremptory in forbidding any repetition of it. He had sent her a note, and she had returned a verbal message by her mother that she did not feel equal to writing. Was it possible that she meant to abide by her insane resolve to break off their engagement?

At Littlehill things were hardly more happy. Nellie was recovering, but very slowly, and she also remained invisible. Arthur Angell manifested all the symptoms of resentment and disappointed love, and only Philip Hume's usual placid cheerfulness redeemed the house from an atmosphere of intolerable depression. Philip had discovered a fund of amusement in the study of Mrs. Hodge. As soon as that good lady's first apprehensions were soothed, she was seized with an immense and exuberant pride in her daughter, which found expression both in

her words and her bearing. Though ignorant of the historical precedent, she assumed the demeanor of a mother of the Gracchi, and pointed out to all who would listen to her—and Philip never thought of refusing her this kindness—small incidents and traits of character which had marked out Nellie from her very cradle as one of heroic mold and dauntless courage.

"I should be astonished, if I did not know her mother," said Philip politely.

"Ah, you must be chaffing, of course. But it's not me she takes it from. My heart goes pit-a-pat at a mouse."

"Oh, then it's Mr. Hodge."

"You couldn't," said Mrs. Hodge with emphasis, "catch Hodge at a loss. He was ready for anything. He'd have been proud to see Nellie to-day. Look what the papers are saying of her!"

"I'm sure she deserves it all."

"Aye, that she does: she deserves all Dale Bannister can do for her."

Philip scented danger in this topic, and changed the subject.

"When are we to see her?" he asked.

"In a day or two, I expect. She's much better this morning. She's asked to see the papers, and I'm going to take her the *Chronicle*."

"How delightful to read of one's heroic actions! I have never enjoyed the sensation."

"Nor ever will, young man, if you spend all your time loafing," said Mrs. Hodge incisively.

"Well, there must be some ordinary people," protested Philip. "The *rôle* is unappreciated, so it's the more creditable in me to stick to it."

"A parcel of nonsense! Where's that paper?"

She took it, went upstairs, and gave it to Nellie.

"There, read that. See what they say about you, my dearie. I'm going to see little Roberts, and I shall be back in an hour. You've got the bell by you, and the nurse 'll hear you."

Nellie, left alone, began to read the *Chronicle*. She read the whole account from beginning to end, the article in praise of her, and, in the later edition, the editor's romantic forecast. Then she put the papers aside, exclaiming: "Oh, if it could be true!" and lay back with closed eyes.

A few days later she made her first appearance in the drawing room, where she held a little court. Her mother hung over all, anticipating far more wants than the patient was likely to feel, and by constant anxious questions almost producing the fatigue she wished to guard against. Tora Smith was there, in a state of gleeful adoration; and Arthur Angell, his sorrows temporarily laid aside, ready with a mock heroic ode; and Philip Hume, new come from Mrs. Roberts' with good news and a high eulogy on Dr. Spink's most marked and assiduous attention.

"I really believe," he said, with a laugh, "that Mrs. Roberts will have another chance of being a Denborough doctor's wife, if she likes."

"That would be an ideal ending," said Tora.

"Therefore it will not happen," Arthur remarked.

"Poets are allowed to be pessimistic," rejoined Tora. "But you're wrong, Mr. Angell. Ideal things do happen."

"To Sir Harry Fulmer, for instance," put in Philip.

"Nonsense, Mr. Hume! I wasn't thinking of that. Don't you agree with me, Nellie?"

"Nellie has made an ideal thing happen," said Philip, and Nellie blushed.

"Thanks, Phil," said Dale. "It's complimentary to describe the prolongation of my poor existence in that way."

"The deed is good, however unworthy the object, Dale."

Dale took Nellie's hand and patted it gently.

"Good child," he said, and Nellie flushed again with an almost strange intensity of embarrassment. Tora rose abruptly, and, in spite of opposition, insisted on departure. Dale escorted her to her carriage.

"I have asked Nellie to come and stay with me," said she, "as soon as she is well enough to move."

"She will like that. I hope she is going?"

"She said," Tora went on, speaking with emphasis, "that she would ask you."

Dale made a little gesture of protest, partly against Nellie's reported saying, more against the reporter's inquiring gaze. He began to be astonished at the interest he was so unfortunate as to inspire in his affairs.

"I shall advise her to go," he said. "I think a change will be good for her."

"I incline to think so too," said Tora with sudden coldness; "but I thought you might not like to part with her."

"Mount Pleasant is not inaccessible," responded Dale with equal coldness. Returning to the house, he found Nellie gone, the company dispersed, and Mrs. Hodge in his smoking room, apparently expecting him.

"Well, mother," he said,—he had used to call her "mother" when he was always running in and out of her house in London,—"Nellie looks quite blooming."

"She's mending nicely."

"I hear she's to go to the Smiths'."

"Well, I thought of taking her to Brighton."

"Oh, it will be more amusing at the Smiths'; unless, of course, she needs the sea."

"She thought, or I thought rather, that you might like to come with us for a while?" said Mrs. Hodge in a tentative tone.

"I can't get away," answered Dale decisively. Nothing would have taken him away from the Grange gates.

Mrs. Hodge took her courage in both hands.

"Look here, Dale," she said. "You know I'm not one of those women that lay hold of a man if he as much as looks at a girl, and asks him what he means by it. That's not my way. Hodge used to say girls could take care of themselves mostly—p'r'aps he wasn't far out. But Nellie's not that sort, and her father's

gone, good man, and——" and the excellent lady came to a full stop.

Dale loved this honest old woman for long acquaintance' sake and much kindness. He laid his hand on her shoulder and said:

"It's a sad world, mother."

"The child's fond of you, Dale. She's shown that."

"I'm a crossed lover too, mother. We can only weep together."

"What, you mean that Grange girl?" asked Mrs. Hodge, her love for her own making her tone tart.

"Yes, that Grange girl," answered Dale, with a rueful smile. "And just at present that Grange girl won't have anything to say to me."

Mrs. Hodge pressed his hand and whispered:

"Don't you tell Nellie what I say, but let her go, dearie, and take my girl. She's sick for you, Dale, though she'd kill me if she heard me say it."

"Aye, but I'm sick for the Grange girl, mother."

"You don't take it ill of me, Dale? But there! a kind word from you is more than the doctors to her. She'd say nothing of what she's done, and I say nothing, but she's a good girl, and a pretty girl."

"That she is, and she deserves a better man than I am."

"Well, there it is! Talking mends no holes," said Mrs. Hodge, with a heavy sigh. Then she added, in an outburst of impatience:

"Why did you ever come to this miserable little place?"

Dale raised inquiring hands to heaven and shrugged his shoulders.

"What they call fate, mother," said he. "Come, cheer up. She'll get over this little idea. She'll be all right."

"Please God," said Mrs. Hodge. "It's time for her beef-tea."

The phrase Please God is as a rule expressive of the speaker's desire, but not of his expectation. So it was with Mrs. Hodge, but Dale could not bring himself to take so gloomy a view. A man's own passion assumes a most imposing appearance of permanence, but he finds it easy to look with incredulity on a like assumption in the feelings of others. He had keen sympathy for Nellie in the moment or the period of pain which seemed to lie before her, but experience told him that all probabilities were in favor of her escaping from it at no distant time. Love like his for Janet—and, till this unhappy day, he would have added, Janet's for him—was exceptional; change, recovery, oblivion—these were the rule, the happy rule whose operation smoothed love's rough ways.

Nevertheless, be this wide philosophical view as just as it might, the present position came nigh to being intolerable, and it was hard to blame him if he looked forward to Nellie's departure with relief. Her presence accused him of cruelty, for it seems cruel to refuse what would give happiness, and it increased every day it continued the misunderstanding which

already existed as to their future relations. Even now, in spite of Janet's protest, Dale was convinced he had detected an undercurrent of jealousy, flowing in to re-enforce the stream of that higher, but stranger and wilder, feeling which had made her drive him away. If she heard that Nellie remained at his house, and what conclusion was universally drawn from the fact, he was afraid that, when restored health carried away the morbid idea which was now most prominent, the jealousy might remain, and, if it did, Janet's proud nature was ground on which it would bear fruit bitter for him to taste.

He could not and did not for a moment blame Mrs. Hodge for her action. It was the natural outcome of her love, and she had performed her difficult task, as it seemed to him, with a perfect observance of all the essential marks of good breeding, however homely her method had been. But she could not understand even his love for Janet, much less another feeling in him, which aided to make her intercession vain. For he did not deny now that, besides the joy he had in Janet as a woman merely, there was also the satisfaction he derived from the fact that she was Miss Delane of Dirkham Grange. Fools and would-be cynics might dismiss this as snobbery; but Dale told himself that he was right and wise in clinging to the place in this new world which his sojourn at Denborough had opened to him, and which a marriage with Janet would secure for him in perpetuity. Setting aside altogether questions

of sentiment, he felt it useless not to recognize that, if he married Nellie Fane, he would drift back into his old world, the gates would close again, and the fresh realms of life and experience, which had delighted his taste and stimulated his genius, would be his to wander in no more. He had grown to love this world, this old world so new to him; and he loved Janet not least because all about her, her face, her speech, her motions, her every air, were redolent to him of its assured distinction and unboastful pride. Nay, even these fantastic scruples of hers were but a distortion of a noble instinct born in her blood, and witnessed to a nature and qualities that he could look for only in the shade of some such place as Dirkham Grange. He felt as if he too belonged to her race, and had been all his life an exile from his native land, whither at last a happy chance had led back his wandering feet. What would dear old Mother Hodge understand of all that? What even would Nellie herself, for all her ready sympathies? It was a feeling that, not vulgar in itself, seemed to become vulgar in the telling; and, after all, he had no need of other justification than his love and his pledged word.

He looked out of the window and saw Arthur Angell walking moodily up and down. Putting on his hat, he joined him, passing his arm through his. Arthur turned to him with a petulant look.

"A lot of miserables we are, old boy," said Dale, pressing the arm he held. "I am often tempted to regret, Arthur, that the state has

not charged itself with the control of marriages. It would relieve us all of a large amount of trouble, and I really don't see that it would hurt anyone except novelists. I am feeling badly in need of a benevolent despotism."

"I'm going back to town," Arthur announced abruptly.

"I'm very sorry. But I don't know that it's any use asking you to stay. Nellie goes to the Smiths' in a day or two——"

"It makes no difference to me where she goes," interrupted the unhappy young man. "I—I mean——"

"I know what you mean."

Philip came up, and glanced keenly at Arthur. Then he smiled good-humoredly and said:

"Shall I prophesy unto you?"

"No," said Arthur. "I know you're going to say it 'll be all the same six months hence."

"I was. I can't deny it, Arthur. You forget that I have seen you like this many times before. We may have a tragedy or we may not, Arthur, but I shall take leave to eliminate you from the cast."

"I'm going to pack," said Arthur angrily, and he went into the house.

"When there are real troubles about," said Philip, "it is well to clear the ground. There's not much the matter with him."

"I think he feels it rather, you know."

"Oh, yes; it's worth a set of verses."

"I'm glad to hear it's no worse; for, to tell you the truth, Phil, there's enough to worry

about without Arthur. I'm glad our party is breaking up."

"Why?"

"We know too much about one another to live together comfortably."

"True. Shall I go?"

"No," said Dale, with a smile; "you may stay and keep watch over the razors."

CHAPTER XXV.

The Scene of the Outrage.

HE excitement and bustle which attended and followed on the attempted murder, the suicide, the inquest, the illnesses, and the true and false reports concerning each and all of these incidents, had hardly subsided before the Mayor of Market Denborough, with the perseverance that distinguished him, began once more to give his attention to the royal visit. For reasons which will be apparent to all who study the manner in which one man becomes a knight while another remains unhonored, the Mayor was particularly anxious that the Institute should not lose the *éclat* which the Duke of Mercia had promised to bestow on its opening, and that its opening should take place during his mayoralty.

The finger of fame pointed at Mr. Maggs the horse-dealer as Mr. Hedger's successor, and the idea of the waters of the fountain of honor flowing on to the head of Maggs, instead of on to his own, spurred the Mayor to keen exertion. He had interviews with the Squire, he wrote to the Lord Lieutenant, he promoted a petition from the burgesses, and he carried a resolution in the Town Council. Mr. Delane was pre-

vailed upon to use his influence with the Lord Lieutenant; the Lord Lieutenant could not, in view of Mr. Delane's urgent appeal, refuse to lay the question before his Royal Highness; and his Royal Highness was graciously pleased to say that he could not deny himself the pleasure of obliging Lord Cransford, knowing not that he was in fact and in truth, if it may be spoken without *lèse-majesté*, merely an instrument in the clever fingers of a gentleman who, when the Prince was writing his reply, was rolling pills in the parlor behind his shop in the town of Market Denborough.

Now, Colonel Smith had never concealed his opinion that, however much evil that unhappy man James Roberts had to answer for, yet he deserved a scrap of grateful memory, inasmuch as he had by his action averted the calamity that was threatening the town, and, furthermore, robbed Dale Bannister of the chance of prostituting his genius. Accordingly, when it was announced in the *Standard*, three or four weeks after James Roberts had shot at Dale Bannister and wounded Nellie Fane, that the Duke had given a conditional promise to pay his deferred visit in June, the Colonel laid down the paper and said to the rest of the breakfast party at Mount Pleasant—and the Colonel must bear the responsibility for the terms he thought proper to employ:

"That old fool Cransford has nobbled the whippersnapper again! We're to have him after all! Good Lord!"

Tora at once appreciated his meaning.

"Papa means the Prince is coming, Nellie!" cried she. "How splendid!"

"Bannister will have a chance of blacking his boots now," pursued the Colonel, trying to impose a malignant sneer on his obstinately kindly countenance.

"You are not to say such things," said Nellie emphatically. "You know you don't mean them."

"Not mean them?" exclaimed the Colonel.

"No. You're not horrid, and it's no use trying to make yourself horrid. Is it, Tora?"

Tora's thoughts were far away.

"In June," she said meditatively. "I hope it won't be the first week, or we shall have to come back early."

The Colonel's face expressed concentrated scorn.

"You would cut short your honeymoon in order to come back?"

"Of course, dear. I wouldn't miss it. Oh, and, Nellie, I shall go in next after Lady Cransford!"

This was too much for the Colonel; he said nothing himself, but his joy was great when Sir Harry pointed out that Mrs. Hedger would have official precedence over the new Lady Fulmer. The Colonel chuckled, and Tora pretended that she had remembered about Mrs. Hedger all the time.

"Johnstone will probably take you in, Tora," said Sir Harry, who had lately found himself able to treat Tora with less fearful respect.

"I don't care. I shall talk to the Prince. Now, Nellie, you must come down for it."

Nellie would not give any promise, and Tora forbore to press her, for she confessed to herself and to Sir Harry that she did not quite understand the position of affairs. Janet Delane remained in strict seclusion; doctor's orders were alleged, but Tora was inclined to be skeptical, for she had seen Janet out driving, and reported that she looked strong and well. Dale was at Littlehill, and he was there alone, Philip having gone back to London with Arthur Angell. He often came over to Mount Pleasant, to see Nellie, no doubt; and when he came, he was most attentive and kind to her. Yet he resolutely refused to stay in the house, always returning in an hour or two to his solitary life at Littlehill. He seemed never to see Janet, and to know not much more about her than the rest of the world did. He never referred to her unquestioned, and when he spoke of Nellie's share in the scene in the garden, he appeared pointedly to avoid discussing Janet's. Tora concluded that there was some break in his relations with Janet, and, led on by her sympathies, had small difficulty in persuading herself that he was by degrees being induced by affection and gratitude to feel toward Nellie as everybody expected and wished him to feel. Only, if so, it was hard to see why Nellie's pleasure in his visits seemed mingled with a nervousness which the increased brightness of her prospects did not allay. Evidently she also was puzzled by Janet's conduct; and it was

equally clear that she did not yet feel confident that Dale had renounced his fancy for Janet and given his heart to her.

In after-days Dale was wont to declare that the fortnight he passed alone at Littlehill was the most miserable in his life, and people given to improving the occasion would then tell him that he had no experience of what real misery was. Yet he was very miserable. He was sore to the heart at Janet's treatment of him; she would neither see him, nor, till he absolutely insisted, write to him, and then she sent three words: "It's no use." In face of this incredible delusion of hers he felt himself helpless; and the Squire, with all the good will in the world to him, could only shrug his shoulders and say that Jan was a strange girl; while Mrs. Delane, knowing nothing of the cause of her daughter's refusal to see Dale, had once again begun to revive her old hopes, and allowed herself to hint at them to her favorite Gerard Ripley. Of course this latter fact was not known to Dale, but he was aware that Captain Ripley had called two or three times at the Grange, and had seen Janet once. The "doctor's orders" applied, it seemed, to him alone; and his bitterness of heart increased, mingling with growing impatience and resentment. Nellie could never have acted like this: she was too kind and gentle; love was real in her, a mastering power, and not itself the plaything of fantastic scruples—unless a worse thing were true, unless the scruples themselves were the screen of some unlooked-for and sudden infi-

delity of heart. The thought was treason, but he could not stifle it. Yet, even while it possessed him, while he told himself that he had now full right to transfer his allegiance, that no one could blame him, that every motive urged him, all the while in his inmost mind he never lost the knowledge that it was Janet he wanted; and when he came to see Nellie, he was unable, even if he had been willing—and he told himself he was—to say anything but words of friendship and thanks, unable to frame a sentence distantly approaching the phrases of love he knew she longed to hear.

Matters were in this very unsatisfactory condition when Philip Hume returned to Littlehill, and straightway became the unwilling recipient of Dale's troubled confidences. A fortnight's solitude had been too much for Dale, and he poured out his perplexities, saying, with an apologetic laugh:

"I'm bound to tell someone. I believe, if you hadn't come, I should have made a clean breast of it to the Mayor."

"You might do worse. The Mayor is a man of sagacity. This young woman seems very unreasonable."

"What young woman?"

"Why, Miss Delane."

"Well, Phil, you must allow for the delicacy of her——"

"You called it infernal nonsense yourself just now."

"I wish, Phil, you'd call at the Grange and see her, and tell me what you think about her."

"I can't do any good, but I'll go, if you like."

Accordingly he went, and did, as he expected, no good at all. Janet had resumed her ordinary manner, with an additional touch or two of vivacity and loquaciousness, which betrayed the uneasiness they were meant to hide. The only subjects she discussed were the last new novel and Tora Smith's wedding, and Philip took his leave, entirely unenlightened. The Squire offered to walk part of the way with him and they set out together.

The Squire stopped at the scene of the disaster. Pointing with his toe to a spot by the side of the drive:

"That's where that mad wretch stood, holding my poor girl," he said.

Philip nodded.

"And where was Dale?" he asked, for it was his first visit to the spot.

The Squire was delighted to be *cicerone*.

"He was standing with his back to that tree yonder, about fifteen yards off, looking due north, toward the house, thinking of a poem or some nonsense, I suppose."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, then," pursued the Squire, "you see he was almost in a straight line with Roberts—Roberts' barrel must have pointed straight toward Denborough church spire. After the first shot Bannister sprang forward—the gravel was soft, and we saw every footprint—to where Miss Fane fell, and——"

"Where did she fall?"

The Squire's toe indicated a spot about three yards from the tree.

"She was running up from behind Bannister, you know, and had just got across the line of fire when the bullet caught her. She fell forward on her face,—she was bound to, Spink said, from the way she was hit,—and Bannister just got his arm under her, to break her fall."

"She was running toward him, I suppose, to warn him?"

"To get between him and Roberts, like the noble girl she is, no doubt; but she seemed to have turned round on hearing the shot, because, to judge from the way she was lying, she was, at the moment she fell, heading almost south."

"What, toward the house?"

"Yes, in a slanting line, from the tree toward the house."

"That's away from Bannister?"

"Yes, and from Roberts too. You see, she must have turned. It was a fine thing. Well, I must get back; I'm busy with all the preparations for this affair. Good-day, Mr. Hume. Very kind of you to come and see us."

"I'm so glad to find Miss Delane better."

"Yes, she's better, thanks, but not herself yet, by any means. Good-day."

Philip went home, lit a pipe, and drew a neat little plan of the scene which had just been so carefully described to him. By the time the drawing was made the pipe was finished, and he was obliged to light another, which he consumed while he sat gazing at his handiwork.

He was still pondering over it when Dale came in, and flung himself into an armchair with a restless sigh.

"What's up now?" asked Philip.

"Only that I'm the most miserable dog alive. I tell you what, Phil, I'm going to settle this affair one way or the other. I won't be played with any more. I shall go up to the Grange to-morrow."

"You can't—it's Fulmer's wedding."

"Hang his wedding! Well, then, next day—and get a definite answer from Janet. It's too bad of her. Did you have any talk with her to-day?"

"Only general conversation. She gave me no chance."

"I don't understand her, but I'll have it settled. I've been at Mount Pleasant, and—by God, Phil, I can't stand the sort of anxious, beseeching way Nellie looks. I know it sounds absurd to hear a man talk like that, but it's a fact."

"Then why do you go?"

"Well, considering what she's done, I don't see how I can very well stay away."

"Oh! No, I suppose not," said Philip, touching up his plan; "but if I were you, Dale, I should wait a bit before I bothered Miss Delane again. Give her time, man."

"No, I won't. She's not treating me fairly."

"What's that got to do with it? You want to marry her, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Then give her time. Give her a week at all

events. You can sound her at the wedding to-morrow, but don't present your ultimatum."

And Dale agreed, on much persuasion, to give her a week.

"That's more sensible. And, Dale, may I ask Arthur Angell down for a day or two?"

"Of course, but I don't know whether he'll come."

"Oh, he'll come, fast enough."

"What do you want him for?"

"To consult him about a little work of mine," answered Philip, regarding his sketch critically.

"Going to publish something?"

"I don't know. That depends."

"On the publishers? *Ça va sans dire.* But how can Arthur help you?"

"He was there."

"Where?"

"Now, Dale, I can understand your impatience—but you must wait. If I publish it, you shall see it."

"Is it my sort? Shall I like it?"

"I think your feelings would be mixed," said Philip, delicately filling in Nellie Fane's figure on the ground.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Against Her Better Judgment.

IT is never well to vie with experts in their own subjects; humiliation surely attends the audacious attempt, and a humiliation which receives and deserves no softening sympathy. Moreover, even if the technical difficulties could be overcome, the description of a wedding must be either florid or cynical, assuming impossible happiness, or insinuating improbable catastrophe. Wherefore this narrative, which abhors either of these extremes, takes leave to resume its course at the moment when Sir Harry and Lady Fulmer have been driven away for their honeymoon, and the guests at Mount Pleasant are engaged in looking at one another's presents, one another's clothes, and their own watches, while a group of men have sought retirement and cigars in the garden. The Lord Lieutenant was paying compliments of alarming elaboration and stateliness to Nellie Fane; and Janet Delane, having discharged her duty in that line with generous graciousness, was looking with despair at Captain Ripley's puzzled face and betugged mustache, and wondering why men could not or would not understand plain Eng-

lish, and why—why above all—they had no more sense of dignity or of timeliness than to renew useless entreaties in a roomful of people, and—to descend to the particular case—with Dale Bannister only a few yards away, paying obvious inattention to a rhapsodic bridesmaid.

"Wasn't it a pretty wedding?" asked the bridesmaid. "You know I'm a stranger to Denborough, and I never knew you had so many beautiful girls. It might have been St. Peter's."

"Might it?" said Dale, with an absent smile, entirely unappreciative of the compliment. He did not know what or where St. Peter's was.

"Oh, it was lovely. Well, dear Tora herself is very pretty. And then, Miss Delane! I do *love* that severe, statuesque style, don't you? How pale she is, though! she doesn't look very happy, does she? Oh, and Miss Fane! Isn't she lovely? She sings, doesn't she? I think people of that kind are so nice. Oh, and I've heard all about her. How nice it was of her to be so brave, wasn't it?"

"Naturally, I think so."

"Oh, of course, I forgot. It's so nice when people are good and pretty too, isn't it? After all, good looks do go for something, don't they?" and she fixed a pair of large and unnaturally innocent eyes on Dale.

"You must tell me about that," he said with labored politeness. "How do you find it?"

"Oh, nonsense, Mr. Bannister! But, seriously, did you ever see anything so lovely as

the way Sir Harry looked at Tora when they were——"

Dale had gone—without a word of excuse. He had seen Janet rise abruptly, with an impatient wave of her hand, and Captain Ripley turn on his heel and disappear into the eddying throng that was circling round the wedding presents. He darted across to Janet, and held out his hand.

"I must see you here," he said, "since you will not see me at the Grange."

The bridesmaid marked their greeting. She rose with offended dignity and returned to her mother. She says to this day that she has only known one poet, and he was not at all nice, and concludes, after the manner of a certain part of humanity, that none of the rest are nice either.

Janet looked at Dale doubtfully, then she led the way to a little room which was free from the crowd. Then she sat down. "I'm very tired," she said, "and I want to stay here and rest. Will you let me?"

"I know what you mean, Jan. How can I, when I never have a chance of saying what I want to say to you? You talk to Ripley——"

"I don't comfort Gerard Ripley much."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Dale heartlessly.

"I'm not much troubled about him. I'm only a habit to him."

"I don't care twopence about him. Jan, when is this sort of thing to end? Don't you like seeing me?"

Janet had made up her mind to treat Dale at first with simple friendliness; if this recipe

failed, it was to be followed by distant civility. She answered collectedly enough, in spite of a quiver in her voice:

"I thought I had better not see you just now."

"Why, in Heaven's name?"

"I can't go through it all again. Indeed I can't, Dale."

"Do you seriously expect me to be content with what you said then—to go away and never come near you again?"

Dale spoke vehemently. It was obvious that the distant civility would be called into play. Perhaps silence was Janet's idea of it, for she said nothing.

"Because that's what it comes to," pursued Dale. "Do you imagine, Jan, I could see you now—after it all—except as your lover? What do you want me to do?"

"Miss Fane——" began Janet in a very small voice.

"I'll never see Nellie Fane again if she robs me of you," Dale declared with great energy, and probably perfect, though unintentional, untruth.

Janet looked up and met his eyes. Then she dropped hers, and said, in tones quite unlike those of distant civility:

"I wonder how you care for such a mean-spirited creature as I am. If I told you I loved you still—how could you believe me? I told you before, and then I——"

"Behaved like a sensible girl."

"Oh, no, no. It was a lie when I said——"

"Tell me another, then," said Dale. "I like them."

Janet's resistance, like Bob Acres' courage, was oozing out of her finger tips.

"I know what it will be," she faltered plaintively. "You'll always be thinking about her, and so shall I—and it will be horrible. No, I won't do it. I have some resolution, Dale; it wasn't mere nonsense. I did mean it."

"Oh, no," said Dale persuasively; "you never did, Jan. You had no idea how bored you would be without me. Now, had you?"

"I can never respect myself again."

"It's quite unnecessary, dear; I'll do all that."

"Are you really quite—quite sure, Dale, that you will never——"

"Oh, hang it all!" said Dale, and he kissed her.

"Dale! the door's open."

Dale shut it, and the rest of the conversation became inaudible, and remains unknown.

The guests had gone. Mrs. Hodge and Nellie, who were to keep the Colonel company for a little while, had walked down to Denborough to tell Mrs. Roberts all about the event of the day; and the Colonel was bustling about, getting the presents packed up, and counting, with some surprise, the empty champagne bottles. He was thus engaged when the door of the little room opened, to let Janet and Dale out.

"Dear me! I thought you'd gone. Nellie asked me, and I told her so."

"I am just going, Colonel Smith," said Janet.

"So am I," said Dale.

The Colonel watched them go together.

"There's another man going to lose his daughter," he said. "By Jove, I thought it was to be Nellie Fane!"

When Janet left Dale at the Grange gates, she went to her father's study.

"Lord, child," said the Squire, "are you only just back?"

"I stayed to see them off."

"Your mother did that, and she's been back two hours. She couldn't find you."

"Papa," said Janet, sitting on the arm of his chair, "I'm very much ashamed of myself."

"What have you been doing now? Ill treating that poor young man again?"

"No."

"He's not a bad fellow, you know, after all—honest and good—not brilliant, of course."

"Not brilliant, papa?"

"I don't mean he's a fool; I believe he's an efficient officer——"

"Officer? Why, you're talking of Gerard!"

"Of course I am."

"How can you imagine I was thinking of Gerard? I meant Mr. Bannister."

"Bannister? Why, you told me only the other day——"

"Yes. That's why."

"Why what, child?"

"Why I'm ashamed."

The Squire raised himself and looked severely at his daughter.

"A precious fuss you've made about nothing."

"I can't help it, papa. I don't want to, but he insists."

"He seems to know how to manage you, which is more than I do. There, go and tell your mother. And, Jan!"

"Yes."

"If ever you say you won't have him again——"

"Yes, papa."

"By Jove, you shan't!" said the Squire with emphasis, and he added, as his daughter fled after a hasty kiss, "Perhaps that 'll keep her quiet."

Dale found nobody but Philip Hume to congratulate him, and Philip was, as usual now, busy over his little plan.

"Oh, she's come round, has she?" he asked, with no sign of surprise.

Dale said she had, and Philip meditatively took up his little plan.

"Have you told Nellie?" he asked.

"No. I haven't seen her."

"She never knew you had asked Miss Delane before?"

"No. Nobody knew but her people and you. I think she had an idea I liked Jan."

"Yes, but not more?"

"No. I don't think so."

Philip whistled gently, and twisted the little plan in his fingers. Dale, in his good humor, said:

"Why the deuce, Phil, do you go on fidgeting

with that thing? You're like an old hen over an egg."

"Yes; I don't know that it is any good. I think I'll destroy it."

And he tore it slowly in two, and threw it in the fire.

"The vindictive theory of punishment," he remarked, with apparent irrelevance, "does not commend itself to me. If no evil consequences exist to be averted, why should we punish?" and he pushed the plan farther into the blaze with the poker.

"If you want to argue that sort of thing, old fellow, you must ring for Wilson. I'm going to have a try at some verses."

"Going to write your own epitaph, like Swift?"

Dale shook his head and smiled, with the impenetrable, hopeless happiness of successful love.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A Villain Unmasked.

A FEW days after Dale's love affairs had begun to flow in a more peaceful channel the Mayor of Market Denborough had an interview with Mr. Philip Hume, and Philip emerged from the conversation with a smile of mingled amusement and perplexity on his face. The Mayor had been to the Grange; the Squire fully approved of the scheme; a hundred pounds was subscribed already, and another twenty or thirty expected. Philip was requested to act as an intermediary, and find out from Miss Fane what form she would prefer that the testimonial which Denborough intended to offer to her, in recognition of her signal gallantry, should take.

"I wanted to wait and make it a wedding present," said the Mayor, with a wink, "but the Squire thinks we had better not wait for that."

"Ah, does he?" said Philip.

"Though what Mr. Bannister's waitin' for I can't see; and I said as much to Miss Janet when I met her in the garden."

"What did she say?" asked Philip in some curiosity.

"Well, sir, now you ask me, I don't think she said anything. She seemed a bit put-out like about something."

"It couldn't have been anything you said?"

"Why, no, sir. I only said as I shouldn't be slow to move if a young lady like Miss Fane was waitin' for me—and her havin' saved my life, too."

"Good Lord!"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir?"

"Nothing, Mr. Mayor, nothing."

"You'll see Miss Fane about it? She hasn't left the Colonel's."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. Yes, I'll see her."

Dale had gone to London, alleging that he had shopping to do, and hardly denying that his business would lie chiefly at the jeweler's. Philip was glad that he was away, for he thus could start on his mission unquestioned. He found Nellie at home, and at once plunged into the matter. Directly Nellie understood what was proposed, she jumped up, crying:

"Oh, no, they mustn't. You must stop them."

"Why, it's a very natural tribute——"

"I won't have it! I can't have it! You must tell them, Mr. Hume."

"It 'll look rather ungracious, won't it? Why shouldn't you take their present?" he asked, looking at her in a half-amused way.

"Oh, no, no! You don't understand. Oh,

what a wretched girl I am!" and Nellie, flinging herself in a chair, began to cry.

He sat and watched her with a grim smile, which he made an effort to maintain. But the sobs were rather piteous, and the smile gradually became very mildly ferocious, and presently vanished altogether. Presently, also, Nellie stopped crying, sat up, and stared in front of her with a dazed look and parted lips.

"Well?" said Philip.

"I won't receive the testimonial."

"Is that all you have to say?" he asked in a tone of disappointment.

"Yes," she answered, plucking nervously at her handkerchief, "that's all."

"No reason to give?"

"Tell them that there's nothing to give me a testimonial for."

"Shall I?" he asked.

Nellie glanced at him with a start, but in an instant she recovered herself.

"I mean that I would much rather no more fuss was made about what I did."

"As you please," he said coldly. "I will tell the Mayor, and get him to stop the thing."

"Is Dale at home?" she asked, as Philip rose.

"He's gone to town. Do you want to see him about anything?"

"No—nothing in particular—only—I haven't seen him for three or four days."

"Are you staying here long?"

"I am staying till Tora comes home, and then I go to her."

"Well, good-by. I'll tell the Mayor."

"Thank you so much. Good-by."

She was quite calm again by now; her sudden fit of agitation was over, and apparently she felt nothing more than a distaste for the parade of a public presentation. So easy and natural had her bearing become that Philip Hume, as he walked away, wondered if he had been on a wrong scent after all. If so, he had behaved in a very brutal——

He broke off his thoughts abruptly, to recognize and bow to Janet Delane, who whirled by in her victoria, on the way to Mount Pleasant. She seemed to be going to pay a visit to Nellie Fane. Philip, who liked to hear how things happen, regretted that he had cut his own visit short and missed Janet's entry.

Janet whirled on. Her balance of mind, delicately poised between her love and her pride, had suffered a new and severe shock from the Mayor's jocose remarks. She could not rest. She felt that she must see for herself —must see Nellie and find out why everybody thought what they did—yes, and what Nellie thought. She was full of things which she had to say to Nellie; she was prepared, if need be, again to sacrifice herself for Nellie, but the truth about it all at least she was determined to hear; on what it was, Dale's uncertain happiness again hung suspended. With her usual frankness and candor, she straightway began to tell Nellie all her story. Nellie listened in almost stony stillness.

"It's so hard to speak of," said Janet, "but yet

I think we must. It is wretched to let things go on like this. At least I am wretched, and I fear he is, and——"

"I'm sure I am," said Nellie, with a forlorn laugh.

Janet came and knelt by her and took her hands.

"You too? you whom we all admire so? Oh, what a world it is! Why did I ever love him?"

"Ah, you do love him?"

"Yes. And why did I ever make him love me? Ah, Nellie, if only——"

Nellie had sprung up.

"How do you know he loves you?" she cried.

"How do I know, dear? Why, he told me."

"When? when?"

"Why, before—the day before it all happened. But since then I have felt, and I told him, that he belonged to you—I mean, dear, that it must be you now whom he must really love, and that I——"

Nellie was not listening.

"He told you before?" she asked in a low voice.

"Yes, the day before. But afterward——"

"You were actually engaged then?"

"Yes, we were."

"I never knew it. I didn't know that. Oh, how wicked I have been!"

"Wicked? What do you mean?" asked Janet, puzzled at her companion's strange behavior.

Nellie stood silent, and Janet went on.

"But I feel, I can't help feeling, that it is to you he owes his life—to you——"

"Be quiet!" cried Nellie. "Are you engaged now?"

"I—I don't know."

"Does he still love you?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Why didn't you tell me? Why did you keep me in the dark? Why did you tempt me?"

"Indeed, I don't understand."

"I didn't know he had told you. I only thought he had a fancy—— Oh, and I loved him too! I did indeed!"

"I know, dear," said Janet; "and so, when you had been so brave, and I so cowardly——"

"Stop!" cried Nellie again, and as she spoke the door opened and Dale Bannister came in. He was fresh back from London, and had ridden over to see Nellie.

He stood and looked in surprise from one to the other. There was evidently something more than an afternoon call going on.

Nellie greeted his coming almost gladly.

"Ah, you are here? Then I can tell you. I can't bear it any longer. O Dale, I didn't know you had told her. Indeed I didn't, or I would never have done it;" and, carried away by her emotion, she fell on her knees before him.

"Why, Nellie, what in the world's the matter?"

"I have been wicked," she went on quickly, clinging to his hand. "I have deceived you.

I have told you lies. Oh, how wicked I have been!"

Dale looked inquiringly at Janet, but she shook her head in bewilderment.

"Well, Nellie, let's sit down quietly and hear the villainy. What is it?"

She refused to let him raise her, and went on, as she was, on her knees.

"I didn't mean it at first. I didn't think of it, but when I found you all thought it, and—and you were pleased, Dale, I couldn't help it."

Dale saw the only chance of arriving at the truth was not to interrupt. He signed to Janet to keep silence.

"I came up meaning to warn you. I was afraid for you. I saw you standing by the tree, and I was running toward you, and all of a sudden I saw him, and the pistol, and——"

She paused and drooped her head. Dale pressed her hand and said:

"Well, Nellie?"

"I was afraid," she said, "and I turned and began to run away, and as I was running, it hit me." And, her confession ended, she sank into a little woebegone heap on the floor at his feet.

Dale understood now. She had been tempted by the hope of winning his love through his gratitude, and had not refused the false glory they all thrust upon her. Now she had heard her hopes were vain, that they had been vain even before that night, and in the misery of sin, and useless sin, she lay crying at his feet, not daring to look up at him.

He stood there awkwardly, as a man stands

when he feels more moved than he allows himself to show.

"Poor child!" he said, with a break in his voice. "Poor child!"

Janet caught him by the arm.

"What does she say? That she didn't save you?" she whispered eagerly. "That she was running away?"

Dale nodded, and Janet fell down beside Nellie, embracing her, and saying, half laughing, half crying: "O Nellie, how sweet, how sweet of you to have been a coward too!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Vision.

THE lawn at Dirkham Grange was a gay scene. The Institute was opened, the luncheon consumed, the Royal Duke gone, full to the last of graciousness, though the poor fellow was hungry for solitude and cigars; and now the society of the county was unbending in friendly condescension to the society of the town, and talking the whole thing over under the trees and beside the bright flower-beds. Lord Cransford, between Janet and Dale, mingled praises of the ode with congratulations on the engagement; no one would have guessed that he shared a son's disappointment. The Mayor indifferently dissembled his exultation over the whisper of a knighthood which a hint from his Royal Highness had set running through the company. Mrs. Johnstone sat placidly in an armchair, the ruby velvet spread in careful folds, while Sir Harry Fulmer paid her compliments, and wondered where his wife was, and how soon they might go; and his wife walked with the Squire, declaring in her impetuous way that Nellie Fane's deceit was the most beautiful and touching thing she had

ever heard of, whereat the Squire tugged his whisker, and said that nobody was disposed to be hard on her. Mrs. Roberts had made her first public appearance, diligently attended by Dr. Spink, who said, but was disbelieved in saying, that she still needed constant care. Nellie Fane herself had been persuaded to come, on a promise that the Mayor should not be allowed to reopen the subject of the testimonial; and Arthur Angell, in whose breast hope was once more a sojourner, had led her to a retired walk, and was reading to her a set of verses, called "Love's Crime"; and Nellie shook her head, saying that there was no inducement to be good if everyone conspired to pet and pamper the wicked.

Philip Hume sat alone under a spreading tree, looking on, and talking to nobody. The bustle of the morning, and the sumptuous mid-day meal worked together with the warm afternoon air and the distant sounds of the yeomanry band to make him a little drowsy, and he watched the people walking to and fro, and heard their chatter in a half-wakeful, half-sleeping state. And, strange as it seems in this workaday, skeptical age, he fell into a sort of trance, and visions of what should be were vouchsafed to him, and if the visions were not true, at least they had a look of truth.

He saw a man, handsome still, for all that his thick hair was a little thinned by time and his waistcoat was broadening, and the man read in a mellow voice lines, which Philip did not hear very plainly, about the greatness of

England, the glory of the Throne, and the calmer judgment of circling years tempering the heat of youth. Then a stately dame touched him gently on the shoulder, saying that the verses were magnificent, but the carriage waited to take him to the *levée;* and he rose to go with a smile, not seeming to notice a pale ghost, that clenched impotent shadowy hands in wrath and with a scowl shrank away. Suddenly, across this vision came the form of Mrs. Hodge, white-haired, but cheerful and buxom as of yore, and she said: "Well, Hume, she's made Arthur a happy man at last;" and the Mayor, who somehow happened to be there, wearing on his breast a large placard, inscribed "Sir James Hedger, Knight," added, quite in his old way: "We were all wrong, Mr. Hume, sir, except you, sir, beggin' your pardon." Then the Squire's voice broke in, as though in the course of an argument, and declared that it was nonsense to attribute Dale's change of views to anything except growing wisdom; and the phantom of Colonel Smith, a copy of "The Clarion" in his hand, answered: "Bosh!" And a crowd of quite indistinguishable, well-dressed shades gathered round the Colonel, and Philip heard them talking about the inevitable gravitation of culture and intelligence. But the Colonel still answered "Bosh!" and Philip did not hear the end of the matter, nor where the truth of it lay; for presently all the forms passed away, and he saw a little room, a little dingy room, and a gray-haired, slouching fellow in an old coat, smoking an old pipe and scrib-

bling on foolscap, scribbling away far into the night, and then sitting and musing for a solitary half hour in front of his dying fire before he went to bed. There was something in this figure that made Philip curious, and he went nearer and looked. Hush! It was himself, and——

He awoke with a start. Dale was smiling down on him with his old friendly smile, and saying to Janet Delane:

"We shall never let this old chap leave us for long, shall we, Jan?"

THE END.

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